

**Keeping it Up: Masculinity in Male-Authored English Fiction  
1950-1971**

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I hereby declare that, except for references to the sources cited, this thesis is entirely my own work and no part of it has been submitted for any other degree of qualification.

Signed

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## **Keeping it Up: Masculinity in Male-Authored English Fiction 1950-1971**

This thesis examines the significance of the category of the masculine in fiction produced in two decades after the Second World War. It argues that masculinity has an influence not just within the delineation of gender roles, but also upon literary narrative, style and definitions of selfhood. It takes as its focus the work of the white, middle-class, English, fiction-making majority, or rather, a group of male writers who strove to interpellate both themselves and their peers as such. Selected novels by authors such as Kingsley Amis, William Cooper, John Fowles, Andrew Sinclair and Colin Wilson are considered in the social and cultural context of the newly-established Welfare State, a time of accelerating capitalism and consumerism. Though they are habitually derided for being apathetic, I will argue that novels of this period have a profoundly political aim: the reassertion of male power and solidarity at a time in which its influence was perceived to be waning. Importantly, these texts are produced before the concerted promptings towards a renegotiation of the concept of gender by Second Wave feminism, and before the publication of Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, which exploded the traditional literary connection of the male with the universal.

Chapter One establishes the theoretical and epistemological framework surrounding the category of masculinity, and examines recent

critical considerations of a gendered relationship between reader and fictional narrative. Chapter Two posits the category of the 'masculine text'. Such a text functions to channel its reader's desire for traditional narrative pleasure and a privileged cognitive role into the acceptance of a range of masculine definitions and principles, most particularly that of a rational and essential masculine self. Chapter Three examines the influence of existentialism. It argues the potential of the philosophy to deconstruct essentialist masculinity, and assesses the extent to which this radicalism is realised in English fiction of the time. In the light of the developing argument for the influence of masculinity on narrative structure and style, Chapter Four examines some of the formally experimental novels of a 'long Sixties', including those by Thomas Hinde, B. S. Johnson and Colin MacInnes. It considers the way in which gendered conceptions of subjectivity, sexuality and youth both compromise and are compromised by masculine narrative tropes.

This study serves to undermine the idea of masculinity as a stable, definable concept. It ultimately establishes gender as a complex and paradoxical illusion, but an illusion capable of enormous influence over the fiction of the post-war period. Its conclusions extend beyond the two decades of its focus to interrogate the gendered nature of any relationship between reader and text.

## Chapter One: Introduction

Tolson's hand fell to that part of his body which seemed to torment  
and mesmerize Leonard the most. 'Well? What theory  
are you going to make up about that?'  
David Storey, *Radcliffe* (1963)

To begin with exclusions: this thesis does not consider the fictional output during the immediate post-Second World War period of women, non-whites, or the non-English. It takes as its focus the white, middle-class, English, heterosexual, male, fiction-making majority, or rather, and crucially, a group of authors who strove to portray themselves as such. In it, I will consider the functions and significance of the category of the masculine in selected novels, arguing that masculinity has profound implications for fictional narrative, style, and definitions of selfhood. This study has specific parameters to its period: it deals with the post-war negotiation of masculinity before the concerted ideological and political promptings of Second Wave Feminism; that is, in the period of literary production from 1950-1971, or thereabouts. My intention is not to detract from the Copernican revolution of society and culture that feminism achieved in Britain. Nor is it to suggest that the Women's Liberation Movement was the fount of female emancipation, for as Deborah Phillips and Ian Haywood discuss in *Brave New Causes: Women in British Postwar Fictions*, its members colluded to some extent in suppressing the contribution of their mothers' generation in

order to glorify the group's emergence<sup>1</sup>. It does, however, uphold Juliet Mitchell's claim for British feminism that, in 1971, on the publication of her book *Woman's Estate*, there was no indication that 'the organized movement can claim more than nuisance value' (13). Feminism, which progressed first into political influence, then onwards to a hugely authoritative intellectual framework, may properly be conceived in this particular period as minor disruption rather than targeted impetus. Doris Lessing's 1962 novel *The Golden Notebook*, for example, can best be understood as symptomatic of a time in which patriarchal power and masculine identity are under threat, but in which there is as yet no articulate political critique of the power structures at stake. Of course, this does not intimate that the changes tracked here in conceptions of masculinity, narrative and selfhood are pro-active: rather, they are profoundly reactive and reactionary, though not to feminism *per se*. Through an examination of a period in which definitions of masculinity did *not* constitute a response to the re-adjustment of conceptions of gender initiated by feminism, it will become apparent that masculinity nonetheless necessarily involves the constant negotiation between the established expectations of manhood and changing social realities. Another vital date in the calendar of this thesis is the 1971 publication of Kate Millett's

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<sup>1</sup> Their conclusions acknowledge a debt to Elizabeth Wilson's 1980 study *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain 1945-1968*.

*Sexual Politics*, the book which exploded the traditional literary connection of the male with the universal and initiated a consideration of the exclusionary tactics of the male fiction-making community. (As well as Millett, Maggie Humm names Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer as Second Wave pioneers of various levels of critical rigour and political influence.) Writing and reading *as a man* was, in the vast majority of the novels considered here, still conflated with writing and reading in general, but, as we shall see, this identification is not without its anxiety.

In choosing to concentrate upon male authors, I am aware that I may be interpreted as promoting a separatist scholarship. There is some sense in which this is true. Just as I would baulk at the concept of a comprehensive study of masculinity in some way 'completing' the feminist literary project, so I believe that maleness needs to find its own revolution, and masculinity its own means of deconstruction, without a reliance upon the female/feminine as example or opposition. In her 1986 article 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', Joan W. Scott claims that 'we need a refusal of the fixed and permanent quality of the binary opposition, a genuine historicization and deconstruction of the terms of sexual difference' (1065). This study aims to achieve the former by means of the latter, and will assess the extent of such a revolution in male writing of its chosen period. I will examine exemplary masculinity as defined by male authors at this time,

where the term 'exemplary' combines a sense of the ideal with the notion of the admonitory; masculinity as great white hope (the designated colour is appropriate), and as cautionary tale. The post-Second World War era is frequently derided for the slightness of its fictional output: Bernard Bergonzi in his 1970 *The Situation of the Novel* calls the English literature of the 1950s and 1960s 'backward- and inward-looking' (56). This thesis is informed by the belief that the period involved a seismic shift in social and cultural attitudes. Fiction functions as a repository both for idealism and anxiety: patriarchy, the system of political rights granted by sole virtue of being a man, was under great pressure at this time, and male-authored fiction is here read as a vital arena for negotiating those stresses. The authors chosen here, in other words, have much both to lose and to gain through a confrontation with the central tenets of their gender. Their work is analysed as an expression of the extent of those stakes, as well as the impossibility of maintaining gender as a coherent definition. As Kaja Silverman writes in the introduction to *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, of her focus upon the United States during and after World War II: 'This book will isolate a historical moment at which the equation of the male sexual organ with the phallus could no longer be sustained, and it will show the disjuncture of those two terms to have led to a collective loss of belief in the whole of the dominant fiction. In doing so, it will foreground masculinity as a crucial site



for renegotiating our *vraisemblance*' (2). Two decades following the Second World War are here isolated as a similar, if lengthy, 'historical moment', one in which masculinity, even when defined and displayed in a traditional manner, was conceived to be failing to pay the traditional dividends. Belief in the 'dominant fiction' of male superiority was being eroded, and, as this term suggests, fictional narrative, as a key space for self-definition and ideological exertion, provides a promising object of investigation, both for conclusions over the historical, cultural and masculine specifics of the era and for wider insights into the reality of gender itself.

### **Reading: Resisting Resistance**

In the introduction to her 1978 book *The Resisting Reader*, Judith

Fetterley notes of American literature:

Though one of the most persistent of literary stereotypes is the castrating bitch, the cultural reality is not the emasculation of men by women but the *immasculation* of women by men. As readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny. (xx)

Fetterley's prescribed female response to this compromise is clear-cut: 'The first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us' (xxii). This thesis

does not, of course, seek to deny the necessary immasculation of women by a great majority of English (or American) literature; necessary in that, in order to identify with these literary works, a female reader must, for the most part, identify against her own gender in act after act of psychic transvestism. Nor does it seek to deny the extraordinary privilege entailed in the act of being born a man throughout all of Western social and cultural history. It does, however, reject a purely resistant reading as a productive or pleasurable response to the male textual viewpoint. Just as Second Wave feminism's early stumbling block was its attempt to define womanhood as universal and in total opposition to a totalised manhood, so the assumption that the only valid female response to a text demonstrating misogynist tendencies is a proud, self-imposed exile seems both profitless and miserable. Jonathan Culler, in his essay 'Reading as a Woman', sums up the way in which a female reader, through determinedly resistant reading, repeatedly reproduces a limiting binary:

In literary criticism, a powerful strategy is to produce readings that identify and situate male misreadings. Though it is difficult to work out in positive, independent terms what it might mean to read as a woman, one may confidently propose a purely differential definition: to read as a woman is to avoid reading as a man, to identify the specific defences and distortions of male readings and provide correctives. (516)

Once again in this strategy, female identity becomes a matter of what it is not: 'positive, independent terms' are avoided in favour of being different from,

and by implication, eternally deferential to, the mighty male. Identity, and identification during the reading process, is presented to be possible only with reference to the gender of the reading self, so perpetuating the dichotomy. Masculine reading is figured as active, and feminine reading as responsive and retaliatory; there is no liberation here, and no feminist strategy of any rigour or promise. As Judith Butler notes in *Gender Trouble*: 'Feminist critique ought to explore the totalizing claims of a masculinist signifying economy, but also remain self-critical with respect to the totalizing gestures of feminism. The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms' (13). For the female example to act as 'corrective' to masculine tyranny, as Culler has it, is nothing but another distortion, one that will be encountered in a number of the later texts considered in the chapters below, in particular those of John Berger and John Fowles. Lynda Broughton's stance in her essay 'Portrait of the Subject as a Young Man: The Construction of Masculinity Ironized in "Male" Fiction' seems similarly unproductive:

Rereading 'male' fictions also enables the feminist reader to apply the same playful analysis to the subject of masculinity, since this is frequently the 'hidden' subject of 'male' writing. Masculinity's sense of itself, recent commentary on the question has suggested, is a construct so frail that it must be constantly reinforced, constantly rewritten; the woman reader of the 'male' text frequently finds herself, to use Simone de Beauvoir's phrase (1953), in the position of one

listening to a little boy telling himself stories, rebuilding himself as subject through the hierarchical structures of sexual difference. (137)

Identification with this constantly alienated and superior attitude – reading male-authored texts as listening to little boys bolstering their egos – is as problematic for a contemporary reader as would be empathy with Geoffrey H. Hartman's creepy simile for the reading process: 'Reading is a modest word, and to defend reading may give the impression of venturing on the minimal. Much reading is indeed, like girl-watching, a simple expense of spirit. Yet the romance of reading has not faded entirely, even today' (248).

Listening to boys or watching girls – infantilising the enemy must surely now be rejected for a concerted and united attempt at understanding, intellectual profit and enjoyment. My own experience of many of the texts considered here has involved a level of pleasure in their reading that I wish to interrogate beyond the assumption of that outdated feminist term of dismissal, 'false consciousness'. In 'Reading Ourselves: toward a feminist theory of reading', Patrocinio P. Schweickart, in her consideration of the lingering appeal of some texts after a feminist reading has rendered them objectionably sexist, asserts:

Fredric Jameson advances a thesis that seems to me to be a good starting point for the feminist reconsideration of male texts: 'The effectively ideological is also at the same time necessarily utopian.' This thesis implies that the male text draws its power over the female reader from authentic desires, which it rouses and then harnesses to the process of immasculation. (534)

The selection process for the fictional texts considered in this thesis will be justified more explicitly in the succeeding chapters, but in general the novels under consideration demonstrate the way in which texts can both be gendered themselves and function to engender a particular type of reader. Schweickart's point, in brief, will be one of the main tenets of belief in this thesis: that identification with a text, rather than a betrayal of feminist principles, is precisely a product of 'authentic desires', desires that deserve closer consideration in order fully to understand the reading process for a reader of either gender.

The problematisation of my own response to the strategies of reader-'imasculation' in these selected male-authored texts leads to a further crucial assumption. This study will conduct its examination of post-Second World War fiction with the conviction that the process of, in Fetterley's term, 'imasculation', uncomfortable and compromising for a female reader, is no simplistic process if the reader is male. As Ben Knights has noted in his *Writing Masculinities*, 'the comfortable normality of reading as a man is an ideologically induced illusion' (23), and this ideology functions precisely to ensure that the category of the 'masculine' (and, by implication, the feminine) is conceived and enforced in order to normalise a specifically distorted experience of both life and text. Gender, in other words, will here be understood as an influential, complex, contradictory and debilitating

illusion. Readings of the selected novels will interrogate the ways in which textual immasculation may be considered to be both a fraught and a profitable process for readers, be they women or men. In other words, the purpose here is not to be accusatory, but rather diagnostic. Any analysis of textual pleasure or desire will avoid subjective assertion in favour of the consideration of a more bilateral reader-response, and ultimately one that posits the dissolution of the gender dichotomy altogether.

Work in film studies has long made use of the concept of 'suture' (as, for example, in Stephen Heath's 'Notes on Suture') in a theorising of the process whereby the reader becomes part of a filmic text's structure through the inferential work s/he is drawn into performing. By making sense of the text, by interpreting it, the reader becomes enmeshed in its structures of power and judgement. Succumbing to these imposed codes can involve conscious surrender as well as conscious sacrifice. Belonging is a powerful and alluring emotion, and identifying with the narratives of these novels, as we shall see, frequently puts the reader in a position of superior vision, situating them at the seat of sense-making. It seems counter-productive to become puritanical about the immorality of this pleasure of kinship or clubbiness, to reject the process of suture as disempowering to the individual. The homosocial community, for all its repulsive tactics, and in spite of the illusory nature of its bonds, remains a powerful and seductive



symbol of solidarity. It is also untruthful to assert that identification with an immasculatory text does not pay out dividends for both male and female readers. As well as a close analysis of the textual tactics that might achieve both the enmeshment and immasculation of the reader, this thesis will ultimately examine the possibility of a textual belonging to male-authored novels, and thence to fiction in general, that does not involve the exclusion or compromise of readers with reference to their gender or any other solitary characteristic.

This is not to suggest, of course, that there is one, 'masculine', reading available for each text considered. As Sara Mills points out in her *Gendering the Reader*, such an assumption would make reading product- rather than process-orientated. Rather, the individual reader is here envisaged as neither wholly free to interpret at whim, nor wholly constrained in the interpretation available to them. Readers have choices. In coining the term 'masculine text', however, I assume that more dominant readings *do* exist, and although the reader is ultimately able to resist, or adopt, a masculine reading at will, a masculine text retains an ultimate political aim – to channel desires for traditional narrative pleasure and privilege into the acceptance of a range of masculine definitions and principles. In her *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*, Lynne Pearce notes how feminist writing frequently marks its addressees as allies using an intimate coded language. She continues: 'The



reason that such signs of intimacy are absent in much male-authored work is precisely because men have traditionally assumed a universal male readership: all the world, as it were, is "his" ally' (39). The male-authored novels considered here will be used to demonstrate that these 'signs of intimacy' are, to the contrary, rife, and that they have a similarly political purpose to those of feminism.

Although a single reading or meaning is impossible, the masculine text can be characterised as striving towards that impossibility, and towards a passive, immasculated reader. It seeks to prevent illegitimate interpretations. In the same way, patriarchy strives for the universal recognition of a unitary principle of social organisation – congenital male superiority. My analysis of the attempts at formal and philosophical manipulation in selected novels will thus engage with the intellectual confrontation of two of the reader-response field's most influential theorists, and negotiate between their positions. For Wolfgang Iser, the text is primary, and the reader engages in a cognitive activity of selecting and prioritising from the multiplicity of structures and strategies that constitute it. A masculine text, I shall argue, works precisely towards the reduction of this multiplicity to one particular set of standards and judgements. For Stanley Fish, the influence of the particular interpretive community in which the reader is situated is primary in the selection of a reading. For a male

community anxious over its waning influence, this sense of solidarity within an interpretive community is crucial, and many texts of this era shall be shown to function precisely to create an illusion of cohesive community, rather than relying on its pre-existence to prompt the 'right' reading. Such ideal solidarity is conceived during the period to be impossible amidst specific contemporary conditions. Immasculation, then, is a social and cultural project, implemented by textual means.

### **Defining Masculinity (/ies?)**

This thesis does not depend upon a concept of masculinity as a psychological state of impoverished emotional development with its roots in childhood separation from a once-available mother and an always-absent father<sup>1</sup>. The literalism of object-relations theory limits gender to a product of home and family, rather than a pervasive and dynamic facet of experience. Masculinity will be read here instead as an effect of the way in which the power relationships of signification, and especially narrative, are organised. 'Being a man', in other words, is read as a particular *style* of being. My focus may be upon male-authored works, but my argument is for universal

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<sup>1</sup> As it is figured in Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*: 'Men defend themselves against the threat posed by love, but needs for love do not disappear through repression. Their training for masculinity and repression of affective relational needs, and their primarily nonemotional and impersonal relationships in the public world make deep primary relationships with other men hard to come by.' (196)

involvement in (and thus some level of culpability with) the fostering of the continuing illusion of masculinity. While excluding (for the most part) female authors, there need be no logical progression to excluding or excusing female readers and critics. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick asserts in her essay "'Gosh, Boy George, You Must Be Awfully Secure in Your Masculinity'": 'As a woman, I am a consumer of masculinities but I am not more so than men are; and, like men, I as a woman am also a producer of masculinities, and a performer of them' (13). She rehearses this point in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*: "'Patriarchy" is not a monolithic mechanism for subordinating "the female" to "the male"; it is a web of valences and significations that, while deeply tendentious, can historically through its articulations and divisions offer both material and ideological affordances to women as well as to men' (141). Yet despite the fact that women both consume and produce masculinity, and occupy a central place in its systems of symbolism, they are without influence in its ultimate evaluation. As Michael S. Kimmel points out in his essay 'Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity', masculinity is 'a homosocial enactment' (128), because, as men, 'we are under the constant careful scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval. It is other men who evaluate the

performance' (128). Though continually couched as rational, independent and isolated, masculinity as a project in fact involves an intense level both of emotional investment and of public performance and validation. Following the introduction in the previous section of the possibility of a text functioning to *immasculate* its readers, I wish to extend this notion of the 'homosocial', to allow its feasible application to an audience of both men and women, provided they accept, for whatever reason, the masculine standards of self and behaviour established by a text. This assumption, then, goes further in justifying my focus here upon male-authored novels only. These novels will be approached as public enactments of masculinity that function through their dominant readings and modes of indirect address to inculcate homosocial investment and approval, achieved through a determined immascultation of the reader, whatever their sex.

As already stated, this thesis takes a still further exclusionary focus beyond the gender of its chosen authors: it rejects a consideration of multiple definitions of masculinity beyond the hegemonic, white, heterosexual, English ideal. Such is the influence of this paradigm, it may be noted how counter-discourses to hegemonic masculinity, both during and after the historical period under consideration, delineate themselves with reference to characteristics *other than* masculinity – sexuality, for example, or race. David Rosen's *The Changing Fictions of Masculinity* takes as its focus the inherent

instability of this concept of hegemonic masculinity, and he notes in his introduction how:

When men experience abrasion between the masculine ideal and the surrounding world, between a shifting sense of self and world and a restrictive or dysfunctional sense of role, they often try to create a new definition of masculinity. In each epoch groups of men try to pass on a stable 'masculinity' that can encompass traditional roles, accommodate new experiences, ensure a meaningful contribution to society, and insulate from the shock of change. But in each new creation, the concept of 'masculinity' multiplies and one concept contests another. Moreover, within this contestation, accommodations take place, so that older masculine ideals inhabit spaces in new ones, although they are transmuted by their new residence. In every age, men experience an abrasion between the concepts of privileged manhood that they inherit and try to satisfy and other experiences to which they try to fit their masculine ideals. (xiii)

Rosen's book is exemplary, though not unusual in studies of its type, in its repeated reference to a 'definition of masculinity' alongside a determined refusal to define said definition. The book as a whole tacitly assumes, however, as in the extract above, that 'masculinity' *does* exist as a conceptual entity, and that although social change prompts the need for new definitions, some residual core of meaning remains and is recognisable to all who encounter the term. In our consideration of the ideas of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick we have already witnessed another common response to the need for masculine definition. Sedgwick pluralizes 'masculinity', then avoids providing definitions for any of the word's supposedly heterogeneous brood. This failure to pin down the meaning of masculinity, hegemonic or

otherwise, I want to argue, is crucially instructive. Definitions of 'masculinity' are routinely avoided precisely because the concept is impossible to define.

In his book *The End of Masculinity*, John MacInnes traces the importance of the idea of gender (though not the term itself) to the work of a number of seventeenth-century theorists of the social contract, for whom it functioned to conceal a troubling contradiction between the patriarchal hierarchy and the universalising tendencies of modernisation:

The concept of gender thus implied being able to hold two diametrically opposed beliefs at once: that masculinity (and its counterpart femininity) was socially constructed (and thus in theory constructable by members of either sex) and that it was naturally determined (so that there was a special connection between masculinity and being male). Without both sides of this paradox the concept of masculinity does not work. Without the first masculinity collapses back into maleness, without the second it loses all connection to sex at all. (25)

The contemporary concept of gender, MacInnes argues, perpetuates this contradictory 'doublethink'. We are content to pluralize masculinity and grant equal opportunities to exercise and consume masculinities, as gender is a social construction, and thus mobile and mutable. This definition of gender allows a decisive rejection of the biological determinism implied in patriarchal social organisation. However, we are also loath to abandon the link between masculinity and maleness, as this link allows us, depending upon our inclination, both a means of punishing men for their legacy of



oppression and a potential mode of liberation for a sex debilitated by this legacy in specific psychological ways. Masculinity requires both a material and a social explanation, leaving us all, in MacInnes's memorable phrase, 'swinging from penis to phallus' (78). Here is the root of the failure to define masculinity/-ies: the concept, fissured with contradiction, cannot sustain a definite meaning. Attempts to define it as cultural construction still perpetuate a tacit essentialism, and attempts to link it to congenital difference must always acknowledge its public, performative qualities. 'Masculinity' is a fallacy, or rather, a phallusy – a signifier for a concept that does not exist. Yet, as Joan W. Scott notes: "'Man" and "woman" are at once empty and overflowing categories. Empty because they have no ultimate, transcendent meaning. Overflowing because even when they appear to be fixed, they still contain within them alternative, denied, or suppressed definitions' (1074). The mere non-existence of masculinity does nothing to exclude it from a powerful political and cultural role.

Masculinity, then, is an illusion. Instability is further built into the epistemological structure of that illusion itself, dependent as it is upon hierarchical binary oppositions as a means of definition. Joining the literary fraternity depends upon a knowledge of binaries, and of the correct side to which privilege should be attributed. When definition depends upon the establishment of the Other, though, the Other is unavoidably positioned in a



site of power, and *its* Other simultaneously undermined and antagonised by that power. Attempts to establish masculinity as a coherent concept, doomed as these may be, I will argue, depend upon a constant process of othering all Others, discrediting them on as many scales of judgement as possible. (The phenomenon of textual 'subaltern-bashing' will be examined in detail in Chapter Two.) This very process of discreditation puts the masculine subject, or text, in a position to which it can never admit – a position of response rather than initiation, reaction rather than assertion. The most potent Other in the novels selected here, both as an instrument of masculine triumph and masculine challenge, is the feminine. This is manifested in the fictional figure of the woman, and also in that of the homosexual male, as masculinity relies so heavily upon the pre-emption and repudiation of homosexual desire. Gay-subaltern-bashing (the first two terms forming a tautology in all the fictional texts examined here) is a process offering a uniquely powerful method of masculine self-definition, as

Sedgwick notes in *Between Men*:

The importance – an importance – of the category 'homosexual,' I am suggesting, comes not necessarily from its regulatory relation to a nascent or already-constituted minority of homosexual people or desires, but from its potential for giving whoever wields it a structuring definitional leverage over the whole range of male bonds that shape the social constitution. (86)

In the era under consideration, masculinity, and gender identity in general,

remain coercive ideals protecting the norm of heterosexual, and patriarchal, social organisation.

### **Post-War Contexts**

Kaja Silverman's term 'historical trauma' (55), precisely because it encapsulates the oxymoronic combination of collective and individual response, provides a useful point to begin the following examination of an era instrumental in shifting masculinity from a perceived universal standard to a complex personal negotiation (albeit a negotiation with an illusion). I do not intend to speculate here on the psychological ramifications of the Second World War upon the men involved in fighting it. Just as masculinity functions both at the symbolic and material level, 'historical trauma' in the English post-war period is rather assumed to incorporate a response not only to the symbolism of the War (what it was figured to *mean*, rather than what it *was*), but also to the profound domestic social change that it initiated, alongside a continuing negotiation of the development of late capitalism and the vertiginous dismantling of Empire. What responses to the instability of Silverman's 'dominant fiction', to the lack of a consensus mechanism, might we anticipate in male-authored narrative fiction? The first, a response directed by a collective vision, would be an attempt to restore belief in a community organised by patriarchal priorities, primarily by a reassertion of

narrative structures that uphold male dominance. The second, motivated by the primacy of the individual, would involve some kind of experiment with traditional narrative models, either as a way to couch fragmentation as universal rather than gender-specific, or in a genuine attempt to respond to change with change. Steven Connor, in his *The English Novel in History: 1950-1995*, mirrors these positions in his consideration of the novelistic response to two distinct but co-existing conceptions of society after the War:

The postwar British novel was required to respond to twin imperatives. On the one hand, there was a certain limited disruption of patterns of social division brought about both by the experience of the War and by the tide of optimism that followed it, producing the sense of a renewed possibility of a unified or common culture which the novel might once again address. On the other hand, the effect of this loosening of the old forms of social division and cohesion, accompanied and accelerated by the increasing commercialisation of the culture industry and its promotion of multiple forms of consumption in unstable cycles of fashion, was to weaken the plausibility of such a collective address. (12-13)

Twin paths, then, present themselves to the author of the post-War novel; another attempt at utopia in a recovery of lost unity, or a continuing vision of disintegration, isolation and depreciation. This duality is replicated in the competing value systems apparent in the contemporary economy – those of the Welfare State versus a state of individualistic capitalist enterprise.

The triumphant ideal of collective responsibility enshrined in the vision of Bevan, Beveridge and Butler was informed by a continuing assumption of national moral superiority, as well as a medieval metaphor of

organic unity. Section 31 of Beveridge's 1942 'Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services' makes this plain: 'The scheme proposed here is in some ways a revolution, but in more important ways it is a natural development from the past. It is a British revolution'. However, the Welfare State might be expected to have complications as a moral template for male authors, due to the fact that its tenets were often presented and perceived in an explicitly gendered manner. One of the Beveridge Report's most interesting (and, for its detractors, reddest) innovations was the recognition in its system of Social Security of the role of the housewife in maintaining the economy<sup>1</sup>, and the role of women in increasing the population. Women as vital resource rather than (albeit charming) burden; the concept (though in truth still a means of maintaining traditional patriarchal labour divisions) was progressive enough to foster fear amidst the male population that an endorsement of the new social structure was in some way an affront to patriarchal authority in its support for a feminized State. The boxed 'Quote' in the *Daily Express* on 23 September, 1960, attributed to 'Sir Cecil Wakeley, a past-president of the

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<sup>1</sup> Under 'Unified Social Security and the Changes involved', Section 30, the report reads: '6. Recognition of housewives as a distinct insurance class of occupied persons with benefits adjusted to their special needs, including (a) in all cases [marriage grant], maternity grant, widowhood and separation provisions and retirement pensions ; (b) if not gainfully occupied, benefit during husband's unemployment or disability; (c) if gainfully occupied, special maternity benefit in addition to grant, and lower unemployment and disability benefits, accompanied by abolition of the Anomalies Regulations for Married Women' (paragraphs 107-117).

Royal College of Surgeons, in London last night', demonstrates that male anxiety over a perceived saturation of the public sphere with feminine values is not limited to the period following the inauguration of the Welfare State: 'We have not yet got to the stage when mothers expect the National Health Service to provide the pink or blue ribbons for their babies. But it will not surprise me if it comes to that. I sometimes wonder if we are not going to finish up with a race of spoonfed mothers' (11). This infantilization, and, by implication, feminization, of the State, is conceived of as having momentous implications. From a point of view which identifies government with patriarchy and self with state, a threat to the maleness of the patriarchal state will figure as a threat both to individual selfhood and to the nation. Masculinity is thus conflated to a state of both ontological and national security<sup>1</sup>.

Anxiety over threats to hegemonic masculinity traceable in the period might be expected to feed not just off the founding of the Welfare State, but also the continuing negotiation of the capitalist progression, another 'historical trauma', albeit a more insidious one. With a traditional and lingering equation of manhood with manual labour, the increasing gap

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of 'nation' provides an interesting comparison to that of 'gender'. It would be controversial to suggest that the concept of nationhood has any essential link to geographical territory. 'Nation' is now accepted as being, in Benedict Anderson's phrase, an 'imagined community' (*Imagined Communities*, 1983), yet the concept of 'gender' still stubbornly retains its association with a sexed body and an essential identity.



between production and consumption, artisan and consumer, remains a vital challenge to a man's sense of his gender identity. In *Writing Masculinities*, Ben Knights remarks upon 'a deep-seated belief that maleness is more authentic, more straightforwardly instantiated in some sections of society than others. To write this down is to be aware what a preposterous belief it is. But its subliminal ideological attraction is a useful reminder of the importance of social icons to any understanding of what masculinity means' (181). We will encounter an enduring suspicion that, if the eternal masculine is by definition working-class (where this implies a combination of labour, liquor and violence), then all middle-class definitions of masculinity are doomed to a permanent awareness of their status as compensation. Working-class male characters figure repeatedly in the fiction of this period as repositories of traditional masculine values, like literary Bevin boys<sup>1</sup>, staying close to the dirt and providing basic energy. Social class is always a mediating factor in masculinity, and the study of selected novels (of a predominantly middle-class group of authors) will enable a consideration of the class structures that they establish, and an analysis of the ways in which these arrangements might be considered to affect the masculinity of the

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<sup>1</sup> Nickname for the young men directed to work in coal mines under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, 1940. Ernest Bevin was Minister of Labour and National Service, and under this edict one in ten men called up between the ages of 18 and 25 were sent down the mines.

protagonists.

Like the Welfare State, the consumer market, as a public space rapidly escalating in importance, maintained troubling intimations of the feminine for the men who had no choice but to participate in it. Women (initially in a colonial context) traditionally function as showcases for the material success of their men, and during the Fifties boom, the economic mechanism of a housewife spending on the home what her husband left it to earn remained the perceived norm. Male consumption, in other words, had always been predominantly vicarious. In truth, of course, modern capitalism poses a more serious threat to masculinity than the accusation of consumer savvy being sissy. The market place depends upon the theoretical equality of all its participants, who can then be interpellated into a hierarchy of consumers (that some are more equal than others in practice is a financial, rather than an essential, matter). These universalising tendencies are in direct contradiction to the patriarchal hierarchy. In a time of rising consumerism, we will also detect a rising anxiety that the way a man is positioned within the consumer market is strikingly similar to his relationship to masculinity: certain objects and attributes are dictated to be desirable, and then the dictatorship itself couched as a realm of free choice and natural attraction. In other words, masculinity, like consumerism, involves a grand and inherently unstable project of interpellation, its instability signified by the continual effort



required to sustain it. In his essay 'Masculinity as Homophobia', Michael S. Kimmel records the embrace by the American male of a masculinity freed by capitalism from privilege and proletarianism: 'It is this notion of manhood – rooted in the sphere of production, the public arena, a masculinity grounded not in landownership or in artisanal republican virtue but in successful participation in marketplace competition – this has been the defining notion of American manhood' (122). In contrast, we shall see how the English manhood of the post-war era failed to adopt Kimmel's slogan for the self-made man – 'He who has the most toys when he dies wins' (122) – for reasons enshrined in its phraseology. 'Toys' are for boys, not men, and though the consumer boom in post-War England can be seen to necessitate an attempt at adjustment in the masculine principle of a real man as a labourer and not a shopper, it is an attempt with little immediate success.

### **The Masculine Self**

As discussed above, masculinity may be characterised as being founded upon an ontology of binary oppositions. Yet as Judith Butler notes in *Gender Trouble*, 'Ontology is [...] not a foundation, but a normative injunction that operates insidiously by installing itself into political discourse as its necessary ground' (148). A patriarchal political discourse will involve the installation of a masculine ontology in order to naturalise its particular

power structure and conceal its essential contradictions. This ontology should be traceable in all arenas properly designated as political. Fiction, I am arguing, as a ludic and liminal cultural space in which the political both dictates theories of identity and is influenced by innovatory new ones, represents such an arena.

This thesis makes and explores the assumption that the self, as apprehended in the post-war period in England, is based upon masculine principles, or rather, that the means used to apprehend subjectivity are based upon tenets that are properly designated as masculine. As Luce Irigaray asserts in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, her analysis of the function of feminine references in the major texts of Western philosophy, 'we can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine"' (133). In her 1971 book *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett stresses the importance of the link between sex-role ideology, subject-orientation and self-definition:

Young boys whose virtually only permitted self is their maleness are continuously harassed by the danger or the accusation of losing their 'masculinity'. And the same psycho-social coercion is applied to girls as well. A painful identity crisis is thereby imposed upon every member of either group – to fail to be adequately masculine or feminine is to fail to be true to one's nature. And as we are born undoubtedly male or female, we imagine that should we lose the certainty of gender identity we may fail to exist; gender identity being the primary identity allowed to children as to adults. (232)

Self-identity remains firmly linked to gender today, of course, but during the

period of study, as we shall see, the only viable selfhood was figured as masculine. In his consideration of Golding's *Lord of the Flies* in *Writing Men: Literary Masculinities from Frankenstein to the New Man*, Berthold Schoene-Harwood characterises the 'mature' masculine self as anti-selfhood, the product of an education in how not to turn the gaze inwards. He notes of the marooned boys' linguistic register that 'the boys' tendency to express their feelings by dint of pre-linguistic neologisms can be read as a symptom of their incipient metamorphosis into men, that is, their gradual hardening and remote-controlled decline into emotional atrophy and self-oblivious role-play' (57). Manhood here is keyed as self-oblivion. I want to argue instead that selfhood as conceived in this era is better thought of as masculine, and the demonstration of adult masculinity in fiction as a painful consciousness of the demands of this gendered definition of self. Masculinity thus becomes a crucial site of negotiating the identity of self and subject, and for understanding the tenets of identity of the period. The masculine self is characterised with reference to its isolation, independence, and rigorous exclusion of what it is not. The definition of the feminine self, by contrast, in novels of this period, is precisely that it cannot be defined. Reinforcing the age-old gender stereotypes, the feminine self is fluid and indefinable, and the masculine, rigid and rational. An examination of the 'masculine self' will predictably prove to be rife with the contradiction implied by the epithet

'masculine'; that of a simultaneous belief of gender as socially defined and naturally provided. Two opposing paradigms of selfhood are in evidence, both dependent upon a concept of transcendency; an essentialist notion of a pre-linguistic, 'given' entity needing protection from all outside threats; and that post-Romantic product, the idea that every individual must be free to develop their selfhood autonomously (an idea with a complex and often contradictory relationship with existentialism, as will be seen in Chapter Three). Both these paradigms delineate a potent, and potentially contradictory, role for the feminine Other. In the first, consolatory paradigm, the congenital, authentic male self confronts the various pressures of technocratization and consumerism, a Lawrentian primitive defined in opposition to the domesticated inauthenticity of the female. ('We are too mentally domesticated', wrote Lawrence in disgust, in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, quoted Knights, 94.) This recourse to a neo-pagan masculinity is a reactionary refusal of the concept of gender as a complex cultural construct. Its pitting of (good) wildness against (bad) domesticity deliberately ignores another potent opposition within the collective consciousness, that of primal evil versus civilized morality (itself a legacy lingering from the discourse of a declining Empire). In the second paradigm, didactic rather than consoling, the privilege in the gender binary shifts. It is the female who is 'natural', irrational, undefined, and the masculine self which gains its authenticity

from sophisticated rational progression and personal dynamism.

Essentialism versus existentialism – both, I will argue, figure as a different kind of response to the contemporary social situation, to the post-War realisation, amidst revelations of the rationalised genocide of the Death Camps, and the fantasies of national superiority that prompted Suez, that morality is heavily context-dependent, and Britain's contemporary context did not allow it a global position as 'moral leader'. Both of these masculine paradigms of selfhood, based as they are upon essentialist existence and existential action respectively, might logically be assumed to be antithetical to the concept of the self as a linguistic entity. Such an assumption, however, would ignore the potency of another recognisably masculine mode of self-assertion, that is, the ability to say who you are and what you think, or the belief that selfhood is something that can, under ideal circumstances, be communicated in language. The majority of the novels here refuse to work emerging contemporaneous theories about the contingency of language into the language of their fiction, and into their conceptions of self. Instead, they tend to make plain a conflation of self and narrative that depends upon an implicit confidence in an empirical link between world, words and self. In the main, the novels considered in this thesis attempt to uphold a similar notion of coherent selfhood as contiguous with coherent narrative, despite the fact that this identification to some extent compromises both essentialist



and existentialist definitions of self. If the self is a pre-existent entity, it should not require narrative progression, and if it is a series of contingent acts, narrative should logically be its antithesis, yet the importance of narrative coherence prevails. Indeed, in an era of profound social and cultural change, male-authored texts have a tendency to subscribe to narrative consistency with a vehemence indicative of a conception of it as a vital means of masculine consolidation in a time perceived as one of decline.

So if selfhood is figured as masculine and identified with narrative unity, can traditional narrative paradigms in fact be nominated as male-orientated? Designating narrative, just as Fetterley designated American literature, to be 'male' seems dismissive of the pleasure it affords readers of any gender. It also tends towards essentialism in its implicit identification of male goal-orientated sexuality with linear, conclusive narrative. Masculine conceptions of sexuality *do* tend towards images of individual conquest, but linking them to traditional narrative paradigms sets a dangerous precedent for a further identification of the feminine as anti-narrative and unscriptable. My examination of the novels selected here will rather consider how far their narratives might justly be characterised as masculine. To hazard an early definition, a masculine narrative paradigm tells its story for masculine ends, to consolidate a community founded upon masculine principles of identity, and to console a gender anxious about its instability. Both these fictional



texts and the contemporary critical writing surrounding them determinedly associate the interpretation of narrative fiction with a process of rational cognition by a pre-existent self. The emotional investment required for this process of identification is conveniently ignored. Texts are couched as *objective* at both their conceived source and their destination, and objectivity, of course, is a strongly gendered concept. In *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*, Lynne Pearce characterises this process as follows:

Reading has been conceptualized as an act(ivity) of interpretation, and interpretation as a mode of cognitive intellectual application; and the way in which both these concepts are classed and gendered to make sure that 'the reader', whether omnipotent, impotent, or somewhere in between, is, at least, well-educated, respectable and (if only symbolically) male. (7)

For '(symbolically) male', we can read 'masculine': the reader is immasculated. I will examine the ways in which selected texts figure reading as a purely hermeneutic exercise, and consider the ways in which their concept of freedom has come to be identified with the unhindered exercise of reason. A narrative quest for freedom, then, and a dedication to the freedom of the reader, becomes contiguous with a striving for successful rational assertion. In this schema, selfhood becomes subject to the same reading process. Linear narrative quests focused upon a unitary self are used repeatedly to reinforce conceptions of self based upon masculinist principles of isolation and relentless rejection of the Other. In other words, unity of text

= unity of self = unity of manhood: *real men write coherent narratives*. Real men, of course, are healthy men, and this conception of narrative as curative is firmly founded in a patriarchal psychoanalytical discourse, in which the doctor dispenses explicatory narratives to the weak-of-mind. In a time of accelerated social change, creating the impression of masculine unity and health is a deeply political project. In order to effect a liberation from the limitation of masculine conceptions of selfhood, I will argue, male-authored fiction of this period needed to re-imagine its models both of narrative and of reading, and Chapter Four considers ways in which the unity of narrative/self/rational manhood was being disrupted by certain texts, and the consequences for masculinity of this disruption. Once again, the ultimate goal is to consider the possibility of a mode of narrative in which inclusiveness does not demand this kind of relentlessly rational identification, to which the only response is the complicity and compromise of the reader, or their excommunication; and to assess the extent to which male-authored texts of the period might realise this goal. Such a mode would not proffer some construction of the female or the feminine as antidote, like Stephen Dedalus's glimpse of womanly beauty and fluidity on the beach, but rather involve an attempt at narrative temptation beyond the binaries.

## Masculinity and Textual Style

We have considered, then, the way in which a narrative might be characterised as masculine, both in the assumptions it provokes in the process of reading and in the definition of selfhood that it fosters. I want now to posit the further possibility of a 'masculine style' of writing to be interrogated by this thesis. Such a style, if identifiable, could conceivably be of enormous value in a post-War project to re-conceal the untenability of gender and to re-assert male dominance. For a male author, writing in a masculine way becomes a project both of self-definition and definition of a community, a declaration of solidarity. How might masculine writing be characterised? Critical works exploring the concept tend towards agreement, and it is an agreement that chimes with the previous identification of a 'masculine narrative' with the perception of rational control. Ben Knights's definition in *Writing Masculinities* reads: 'The male paradigm (whatever the actual gender of the writer) tends to *éloignement*, to ironic or judgmental distance, to positive and judicious knowledge, to the overview – in the end to mastery of a subject matter, or even to Olympian detachment' (64-65). His 'male paradigm' is better designated 'masculine'. Women can conceivably write in the masculine style, just as, through compliance with processes of textual immasculation, they can read in a masculine way. Masculinity is again identified with objectivity, demanding that men are held in the

position of observers and recorders of their own experience. Masculine writing might be characterised, then, by its similarities to 'masculine narrative', that is, in its tendency to make a fetish of 'meaning' or 'correct interpretation'. Its goal is the projection of a unitary consciousness, both in its portrayal of the central character and its conception of the ideal link between that character, the narrator, and the reader. As we will see, this connection, contrary to all contemporaneous avowals of authorial death, or gaps between signifiers and signified, is frequently extended to include the writer too. In his essay 'The Masculine Mode', Peter Schwenger, having identified the writing of Mishima and Hemingway as sufficiently pared down and emotionless to be nominated 'masculine', goes on to argue for a further characteristic of the style:

If Mishima and Hemingway are reserved in style, they are less reserved in subject matter as they freely incorporate into their works many of the most intimate elements of their lives. This is going to be the case in many works of the masculine mode, since a man's relation to his own masculinity is always an intimate matter. A confessional element then must be considered and accounted for in an investigation of masculine style. (105)

One of the struggles of the Women's Movement at the end of the era under consideration was to establish the possibility of female experience being recorded and judged objectively. A need for the opposite project might be diagnosed for men at that time, that is, the need to prove the subjectivity of male experience in an attempt to assert the right to individuality and

personal emotional authenticity. Here, Schwenger turns that need into a foregone achievement, as he makes confession a crucial characteristic of his 'masculine mode', a gambit which seems to jar with the characteristics he has already established in the work of his masculine practitioners. This might be read as an attempt to negotiate a perennial problem of the artist within a masculine epistemology: art has become a political project, and the artist shoulders the burden of social security. However, within that masculine-orientated society he is eternally suspect in his desire to reveal his interiority. Under the terms of masculine selfhood, he might be judged lacking in control over the boundaries of his self. Yet is a man's masculinity properly designated 'always an intimate matter'? Yes and no – it depends upon intense emotional investment at the same time that it ruthlessly subordinates the personal in its obsession with the objective and the universal. Masculine writing in the era under consideration, a considerably less utopian time than that within which Schwenger apparently revels, will be assessed for the possibility of a distinctive style. Chapter Four conducts an analysis of male-authored works that present themselves as self-consciously confessional, but which do so in order to establish themselves as innovations within male writing: the motivations and results of this will be considered in detail there. In general, though, confessional modes of writing by men, at least in this period, play constantly with the dividends of what David Goldknopf, quoted



in Dorrit Cohn's *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, terms 'the "confessional increment"' (15). This involves a tacit assumption that, precisely by thwarting the expectations of how men should write in order to include personal revelations, the narrator, and by implication, the author, is taking a heroic and admirable risk.

The potential of intimate disclosure provides an interesting point of debate around the writing of an era in which, from the 1960s onwards, sexuality was increasingly upheld as a route to personal authenticity and self-definition, to both knowledge and identity. Even before that date in the Sixties that, for Philip Larkin, 'sexual intercourse began' ('Annus Mirabilis', 167), a burgeoning frankness about sexual matters was beginning to demand codes for a (hetero)sexual morality outwith the auspices of the patriarchal family. The Kinsey reports on the sexual behaviour of the American (the first, predictably focused on the male, published in 1948), and their later English counterparts in the reports of Masters and Johnson, posited the placing of what had previously been considered 'private' in the public domain. For masculine writing, the treatment of sexuality was, in the era under consideration, yet to be fraught with the accelerating identification of feminist literature and theory with a project of writing the (female) body. Yet the representation of sex in male-authored literature is already complicated by a contradiction of paradigms similar to that which we encountered in our



consideration of selfhood. In his essay 'Pornography' in *The Sexuality of Men*, there is an instructive description by Andy Moe of the way in which (male) sex aids are marketed: 'These sales blurbs make one thing perfectly clear: phallic desire is a matter of alienated work, the instrument of that work being the male body, or more precisely the erection' (63). 'Phallic desire', or the proper sexuality of the patriarchal male, in the first paradigm, is associated with labour, both physical (bodily) and intellectual (in the effort to assume control of the act and its valences of power). Desire becomes a job description, and writing desire, demanding employment. The other paradigm of male sexuality provides a mirror-image of the first in many ways: instead of domestic chore, the libido (for the libido is gendered masculine) is figured as a primitive force, redolent of the forest. The literary debt here, of course, is to D. H. Lawrence, and his influence will be considered in more detail later. What this paradigm shares with its counterpart is the recognition of sexuality as having the potential to disrupt society, but this definition of the masculine sex-role gains its prestige from the threat of a violent unleashing, rather than the heroism of control. In a period of English history which established sexuality as a paramount component of identity, writing sex may be expected to be fraught with implications for masculine self-definition and political assertion.

## Chapter Two: The Consolations of Conformity

‘Well,’ she says in a minute, ‘how does it feel to be a man?’

I give a laugh. ‘Ask me another.’

Stan Barstow, *A Kind of Loving* (1960)

It has become a cliché that the years immediately following the Second World War in Britain witnessed social change at a bewildering pace. The War was a defining experience for more than one generation of men, whether through active or national service, or evacuation. Rather than attempting to assess the impact of these fractured and various effects of combat, however, this chapter will focus upon the more cohesive experience of post-war social conditions of the Fifties and early Sixties. The Empire slipped dramatically from Britain’s grasp, and England moved from rationing to affluence in a matter of years. The period combines this perception of a time of profound and unnerving change with a simultaneous political apathy, the allegedly unavoidable curse of social prosperity. Maschler’s *Declaration*, published in 1957, and intended as a crescendo to the angry howls of the young generation, contains little more than a few ineffectual rants about the over-privilege of monarchy and the state of the West End stage. This glaring lack of *Look Back in Anger*’s Jimmy Porter’s much-missed ‘good, brave causes’ (84) is a lack of good, brave, *public* causes. The radical social reorganisation effected by the inauguration of the Welfare

State is perceived in the male-authored fiction of the period not as an expansion of public and patriarchal morality, but as its ignominious scaling-down. It is simply not radical enough. Rather than a grand civic project, the Welfare State is, as we shall see, apprehended as a nagging interference in the quotidian. The public sphere is compromised by its concern with private matters: Anthony Hartley notes a common sense of increased 'state intervention into the affairs of the individual', which has begun 'to resemble that which all too frequently accompanies the ministrations of a well-meaning but fussy maiden aunt' (147). This is in spite of the fact that, as social work policies placed a new emphasis on prevention, direct state intervention was predominantly targeted at working-class homes judged to have, as Elizabeth Wilson puts it in *Women and the Welfare State*, 'difficulty in caring for their children in a socially acceptable way' (88). Ultimately it is less the case that there was increased intervention by the Welfare State mechanisms into the families of those producing fiction, and more that the very concept of welfare undermines two crucial assumptions. These assumptions are characteristically masculine ones: that the authority of the (male) individual is paramount, and the patriarchal family is 'natural', and naturally good.

Jimmy Porter remains infamous for his raging against the influence of women. In an article entitled 'What's Gone Wrong with Women?' in the

*Daily Mail*, 14 November 1956, his creator John Osborne blames the loss of male dynamism in a welfare-ridden state upon 'the fact that we are becoming dominated by female values, by the characteristic female indifference to anything but immediate, personal suffering' (256). Elizabeth Wilson quotes a 1948 article, 'Family Relationships', from the journal *Social Work*. Its author, A. Maberley, ascribes the danger of the welfare system not to the fact that it feminizes the members of a society, but that it lures them into childishness, nurturing:

A tendency for the man or woman to retain towards society the infantile dependence appropriate in the child, with a demand for maintenance as a right without obligations in return. While the child is justified in this attitude the adult is not. The adult should contribute to society as much or more than he receives back. (*Women*, 158)

Ultimately, whether the threat to masculine authority is couched as feminization or as infantilization, a goal has been achieved – the removal of blame from men themselves, demonstrated by Osborne's audacious *Daily Mail* headline.

Contrary to this reaction against the Welfare State is a desire to revere it as the enshrinement of values of logic and fairness, and the harbinger of a genuine English meritocracy. It is interesting how criticism can routinely understand the characteristic novels of the English Fifties (the work, for example, of Kingsley Amis, John Braine and John Wain) as a reaction to the political and social realities of the Welfare State, whilst simultaneously

labelling them apathetic and apolitical. Conflict within the dominant ideological structure is characterized as altogether less political than would be attempts to envisage alternatives to that structure. Anthony Hartley notes that:

A great deal of post-war literature has been concerned with producing this sort of mythical virtue out of necessity, with pretending that Birmingham is as interesting a place to inhabit as Berlin or that the amenities of Manchester compare with those of Milan. For a novelist this can take the form of a praiseworthy preoccupation with the material around him, but the attitude in itself becomes narrow and banal after a while. (48)

Narrow this material might seem to Hartley, but this genre of English fiction conceals beneath its alleged banality a wide-reaching political project. As noted in Chapter One, Silverman defines what she calls 'historical trauma' as a historical occurrence, 'whether socially engineered or of natural occurrence', which causes a large group of men to 'withdraw their belief from the dominant fiction. Suddenly the latter is radically de-realized, and the social formation finds itself without a mechanism for achieving consensus' (55). This chapter takes as its focus a selection of novels that make an attempt to design such a mechanism within the larger social engineering works of the Welfare State.

## An Empirical Example

In his introduction to the 1969 reprint of William Cooper's 1950 novel *Scenes from Provincial Life*, Malcolm Bradbury quotes approvingly from John Braine's assessment of the book: 'Seminal is not a word I am fond of, [...] nevertheless I am forced to use it. This book was for me – and I suspect many others – a seminal influence' (i). Bradbury goes on to designate *Scenes from Provincial Life* to be 'the novel in its empirical form. It could and did stand for an important swing away from the stylistic backlog of modernism, or what William Cooper calls the 'Art Novel': a swing towards an art of reason, an art of lived-out and recognisable values and predicaments' (iii). I want to argue that *Scenes from Provincial Life* might justifiably be nominated a 'seminal' novel, in that its narrative and stylistic techniques are instrumental in establishing a recognisably masculine style both of text and of the selfhood defined within that text. Bradbury's assessment is indicative of a pervasive misreading of this style, in his apprehension of the novel as empirical, with all its assumptions immediately verifiable from the experience of each reader, as well as a conflation of empiricism with rationality. As he notes, this movement towards a professed empiricism in fiction is profoundly reactionary, not only to the Modernist undermining of fictional realism through its fracturing of narrative, language and linear time, but also to the



experience of the Second World War. A memory for the public's enthusiastic response to Churchill's nationalistic rhetoric was liable to provoke an unsettling debate over degrees of totalitarianism across the European continent. Unsurprisingly, a backlash occurred against grand words and grand gestures. George Orwell, with his prescient distaste of slogans and linguistic conjuring tricks, was an obvious exemplar, his taste for 'common sense' in writing (as well as his suspicion of a lust for power in Left politics of the Thirties and Forties) an important inspiration. Hartley views him as the source of all contemporary style: "The "no nonsense" air of an entire generation comes from Orwell. Anyone brought up on his works will try to say what he means as directly as possible, and what he means will often sound less than urbane' (54). The texts considered in this chapter are determined in their demonstration that realism, and in particular the transparency between experience and language that the term implies, had survived all the surreal horrors of the war.

*Scenes from Provincial Life* is explicit in its bid to focus attention upon the 'lived' experience of its 'ordinary' narrator Joe Lunn. His decision to privilege his personal life is deliberately amplified in its radicalism by the harsh political reality of the novel's 1939 setting:

Sometimes I tried to link the disintegration of our private lives with the disintegration of affairs in the world. I saw us all being carried along into some nameless chaos. Yet it rang false. In spite of what the

headlines told me every morning, in spite of what I reasoned must happen in the world, I was really preoccupied most deeply with what was going on between me and Myrtle and between Tom and Steve. People can concentrate on their private lives, I thought, in the middle of anything. (171-72)

Survival under contemporary conditions is only assured by maintaining empiricism, that is, by refusing to speculate over universal themes, but rather thinking (and writing) about what you know. At the novel's opening, Joe is failing to maintain this empirical correspondence in his professional life. He receives a letter from the headmaster of the school in which he is employed, advising him to reconsider his vocation:

From questioning the headmaster's actions, I went on to question my own. I was soon immersed in serious philosophical doubts. Perhaps the headmaster was right. It might well be that a schoolmaster really ought to behave like a schoolmaster. If I could not behave like a schoolmaster, perhaps I ought not to be one.

This left me faced with the most alarming question of all.  
'What *can* I behave like?' (137)

This, of course, is a recognisable tactic of the *bildungsroman* – the beginning of the philosophical and physical quest for an authentic vocation, in which professional behaviour is a direct translation of the priorities of the inner self. Yet the link between male self-definition and narrative runs deeper than the repetition of a mere plot device.

In her book *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction*, Kim L. Worthington asserts that: 'Frequently in contemporary theory, textual and personal autonomy are promoted as the

refusal to conform to prevailing conventions of value and practice, and as the shattering and dispersal of received, normalized modes of expression – in other words, as the refusal to comply with expectations of narrative followability’ (28). *Scenes From Provincial Life*, and the male fictional trope that was to follow its lead, pre-date this assumption, creating and promoting a notion of selfhood the validation of which depends precisely upon conformity with both the contemporary ‘conventions of value and practice’ and ‘expectations of narrative followability’. Joe Lunn’s position as hero of the novel is justified in one proclamation: ‘In my own behaviour I aimed at some sort of consistency, and until I knew Tom I was under the impression that other people did the same. Not a bit of it! Tom was a revelation to me, and through him others were revealed. Only through observing Tom, I decided, could one understand the human race’ (200-1). Tom’s qualifications to be nominated a part of that inferior breed ‘the human race’ will be considered later, but the nature of Joe’s heroic superiority is plain; an inner selfhood repeatedly (and empirically) proven in behaviour consistent with it.

This notion of heroic selfhood as stemming from conformity to rationally ascribed levels of consistency is enshrined in the novel’s narrative technique. This hinges upon a retrospective analysis by Joe the writer of his younger life experiences. This contrivance replicates the traditional hierarchy of patriarchy within one literary character: the adult artist Lunn

controls and explains the narrative of his rebellious and boyish self, admonishing him with a comic irony licensed and defused by hindsight. The man is father of the child here, and emphatically not vice versa. In his book *Writing Masculinities*, Ben Knights notes of the male textual paradigm: 'The normative position of the narrator and of the implied figure of the male author behind him is thus one from which he exercises discriminating power over both subject matter and reader. The pay-off to the reader is membership (at least in fantasy) of a club made up of those who share superior vision' (65). When the narrator is an author himself, the 'pay-off' of the reader's (imagined) proximity to the centre of artistic production, to the site of sense-making, is increased still further. The Agatha Christie mode of narrative – the confused eye-witness version later rationalised and explained by the detective's re-telling – is here pared down to allow only the detective's voice, thus serving the masculine prerogative of portraying existence as aetiological, with an essential self initiating goal-directed action. The Romantic ideal of the artist as tortured solipsist is rejected utterly. The narrative idiom of *Scenes From Provincial Life* further extends this illusion of reader-privilege, both in its simple, reasonable register and in its frequent appeals to, or rather assumptions of, a universal (although explicitly male) code of experience, as in these examples: 'There is nothing makes a man feel so wonderful as a wonderful girl' (34); 'I was faced with an inescapable truth:

you cannot have a mistress and read' (40); 'The thought of somebody else [having sex], in the room above, on a Sunday afternoon – the mystery of it! What man can honestly say he does not know what I mean?' (97).

For all the novel's professions of commitment to the personal, the technique of retrospection also allows the narrator tactfully to shirk any description of emotional experience. When Joe's relationship with Myrtle comes to an end, he shares this much with his reader: 'A love affair cannot end without heartbreak. And as I have already told so much, I think the time has come for me to draw a veil' (259). Joe's emotional expression is limited to a letter to Robert articulating his anger at the behaviour of their mutual friend Tom. Despite traditional acceptance of the letter as a sanctioned forum for personal confession, the reader is allowed only a glimpse of its purportedly lengthy contents, and this revelation is immediately followed by an ironic, but nonetheless telling, assertion of manhood: 'After completing it I felt a certain satisfaction at having stated my position. To state one's position is a firm, manly thing to do: it is right that it should give satisfaction' (249-50). Other characters in the novel are frequently discredited with reference to their emotional volubility. In the sexist idiom of the era, in Myrtle's case, this is predictable and swiftly explained with reference to her gender, but Tom's inconsistency is repeatedly attributed to the 'great fund of emotion' (13) that he is uninhibited in spending in public.



This discreditation of all the characters involved in the hero's life is another noteworthy facet of the novel's technique of masculine self-definition. In his book *The Inward Gaze*, Peter Middleton considers the way in which Hegel grounds the emergence of self-consciousness in an allegorical battle between two men: the master/slave dialectic. He concludes that: 'The masculinity of the model is not incidental' (213). (The fact that this dynamic lingers today as a means of understanding identity is a telling indication of the way in which theories of selfhood remain dominated by masculine priorities.) Joe's position as hero and sense-maker, and the reader's complicity with that position, is enforced by means of a programme of comprehensive subaltern-bashing amongst all the other fictional males. Joe's rival for Myrtle, Haxby, is swiftly despatched as a serious threat by means of a description of his social circle: 'They had intense black eyes and jerky movements. I thought their appearance was mildly degraded, and I called them the Crows' (145). (Haxby himself has no direct role in the text, and so readers are left unable to assess the validity of this judgement.) As well as being over-emotional, Tom is also homosexual, and although the novel distinguishes itself to a certain degree amongst its contemporaries in deigning to include a gay male character, the predominant function of this narrative device is defensive humour. Hearing of Tom's boyfriend Steve's attempts to join the merchant navy, Joe notes wryly: 'I guess you've already



received enough training for the Merchant Navy in arithmetic. As in certain other basic subjects, too' (106). Of course, Tom's emotional lability is intended to be conflated with his homosexuality, and, I would suggest, with his Jewishness. The sentence in which this latter defining trait is introduced is instructive: 'With the best will in the world you could not help noticing immediately that Tom was red-haired and Jewish – it fairly knocked you down' (12). Tom's ethnic background has the added plot-device of making his much-discussed move to America in the face of war more urgent, but his red hair? Any doubts we might have over the desirability of this attribute are banished in a later description: 'He straightened his tie, which was wine-coloured – a mistake, in my opinion, since it enhanced the contrast between the gingery redness of his hair and the purplish redness of his face' (108-9). The complexion of the redhead, the reader is instructed, is an undesirable, unattractive one: this shorthand code of petty prejudices, only mildly effective in isolation, runs parallel to the major code of discreditation, echoing and reinforcing it. If the reader is to bask in the masculine privilege of identification with the rational narrator, s/he must also accept complicity in this attendant set of irrational values. A paradox is apparent: the venerated rational and independent masculine self is established only by means of the irrational emotive investment of a whole community of readers. The only character in the novel to be unaffected by this process of

compulsive subaltern-bashing, and treated to unchecked praise, is the Dean of Joe's Oxford college: 'His name was Robert, and he was a few years older than us. He was clever, gifted and wise; and he had a great personal influence on us. We had appointed him arbiter on all our actions, and anything he cared to say we really accepted as the word of God' (18). The recipient of Joe's epistolary confessions, but always defined by his absence, Robert is sanctioned to enjoy the position of omniscient patriarch, the same position occupied by the narrator looking back on his boyish self.

In *Gendering the Reader*, Sara Mills draws attention not only to narrative modes of direct address, but also to "'indirect address", where elements of background knowledge are assumed to be shared and where certain information is posed to the reader as if it were self-evident' (26). This auxiliary code of values does not only apply to the description of men in *Scenes From Provincial Life*. The reader's identification with the narrator's decisions and motivations surrounding his relationship with Myrtle depends upon an appreciation of her desirability, and the initial inventory of her physical attributes seeks to inscribe this male heterosexual desire as normative and inescapably sexually arousing:

Instead of speaking, I glanced at her. What I saw was entirely pleasing. The sooner we reached the cottage the better.

Myrtle was modestly tall and very slender. She was wearing grey slacks and a cerise woollen sweater. Her breasts and buttocks were quite small, though her hips were not narrow. She was

light-boned, smooth and soft. There was nothing energetic or muscular about her. (25)

Fragility, passivity, child-bearing hips – these quintessentially feminine characteristics are firmly designated as ‘entirely pleasing’ before they are listed. Later Joe notes ‘I have described up to date those of her traits which everyone recognizes as essentially feminine’ (64). Coerced into desiring femininity, the reader is immasculated again.

While professing its political quietism, *Scenes from Provincial Life* reveals itself to be an intensely political work, engaged as it is with the establishment of a position of rational and artistic privilege which can be achieved only by means of the acceptance of a host of attendant social judgements. This allegedly apathetic text is in fact engaged in a grand project of interpellation focused upon the reassertion and consolidation of masculine priorities and the patriarchal community. It functions in such a way that rooting for the central character’s emancipation, a familiar impulse towards a utopian position, is possible only at the expense of a subscription to a profoundly masculine account of self and of others, from an inescapably middle-class viewpoint. This, then, is what I am designating the ‘masculine text’. Emotion must be ruthlessly rejected as a response. Desire is only valid if it is uncompromisingly heterosexual and directed towards a feminine ideal. All messy and alternative selfhoods must be discredited for heroic

independence to be fully achieved. Bradbury's determination to emphasise the novel's empiricism may be read either as unwitting compliance with the novel's narrative and stylistic technique, or a devious complicity with a masculine community aware of its waning influence. In his essay 'The Modern, the Contemporary, and the Importance of being Amis', David Lodge notes in a discussion of *Room at the Top*, and by implication, its contemporary, 'realist' male-authored novels, that 'the danger with the contemporary [as opposed to 'the modern'] – and it is as much a danger for himself as for the critic – is that, seduced by the superficial thrill of recognition, or by the coincidence of the writer's values with our own, we may overestimate him' (44). In 'Is There a Text in This Class?', Stanley Fish shares Lodge's assurance of an easy (though, in Lodge's case, suspect) identification with the normative values of a text:

These norms are not embedded in the language (where they may be read out by anyone with sufficiently clear, that is, unbiased, eyes) but inhere in an institutional structure within which one hears utterances as already organized with reference to certain assumed purposes and goals. (306)

My argument throughout the examination of the novels selected in this chapter is that these texts function precisely so that the 'thrills of recognition' come about not necessarily through a conflation of the reader's experience with the 'reality' of the text, although this may occur on occasion, but rather that thrills of identification and belonging are manufactured and imposed by

the texts themselves.

Steven Connor notes the way in which:

Novels of this period are characteristically driven (and sometimes instructively defeated) by the desire to build anew the ideal reciprocity between text and reader that seems to have been diffused by competing cultural forms and increasingly complex social differentiations. But they are also characteristically aware of how risky and uncertain this ambition is. (13)

Various names have been spawned for this putative reader with a perfect understanding of the text – Iser's 'implied reader', Rimmon-Kenan's 'narratee', Connor's 'addressee', or a member of Stewart's 'conscripted audience'<sup>1</sup>. I prefer instead to rehabilitate New Criticism's 'ideal reader'. The adjective echoes Connor's phrase 'ideal reciprocity' above, as well as Habermas's concept of the 'ideal speech situation', defined as a consensual, rational, totalized act of communication. In the novels considered in this chapter, concerned as they are with establishing a masculine consensus, the ideal reader is too important a person to be met merely by chance. The masculine text is an attempt to close down all possibility of the reader being anything less than ideal. As masculinity, and the masculine conception of self, require, in the words of Michael Kimmel, a 'homosocial enactment', ('Masculinity as Homophobia', 128), the ideal of the masculine text is to make

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader*; Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction, Contemporary Poetics* (104); Steven Connor, *The English Novel in History: 1950-1995* (9); Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth Century British Fiction* (5-6).



its reader a man.

### **(Middle-) Classless Aspirations**

Following this reading of *Scenes from Provincial Life*, then, it does not seem unreasonable to expect an author who has professed himself to be under the influence of the novel to address this agenda of a masculine construction of selfhood and text in his own work. John Wain's 1953 novel *Hurry on Down* does just this, and does it with a heavy dependence upon a particularly middle-class code of recognition in its chronicle of the various life-choices of its hero Charles Lumley. The methods of subaltern-bashing are in evidence again, as a large part of the humour of the early sections of the novel is achieved at the expense of George Hutchins, who, with his Midlands provenance revealed by his parents' 'Birmingham speech' (14), is immediately established within the 'provincial scholar' trope (more usually from Yorkshire) utilized in numerous novels of the immediate post-war period (for example, Whitbread in Philip Larkin's *Jill* and Johns in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*). The only homosexual man to appear in *Hurry on Down* is swiftly identifiable to Charles and to the ideal reader and dismissed accordingly: 'Standing beside him was a young man in grey suède shoes; Charles caught sight of those shoes and decided that he now knew all he wished to know about one guest at least. He avoided glancing in his



direction again' (111). This provides an instructive example of the development of Cooper's technique of loading seemingly innocuous visual details with moral implications, compressing large numbers of attendant value judgements into a single symbol; here, suede shoes = homosexuality = anti-masculine = anti-rational, and so on.

Elsewhere these codes are less compact but just as striking. The novel articulates a mistrust of the new breed of male professional, the salesman. The chief figure-head for the breed, the successful Mr Braceweight (his name suggesting the strain of his existence) is dangled before the reader for much of the novel as a potential 'fairy-godfather' figure with the potential to rescue Charles from the turmoil of youth, but this possibility is foreclosed with the description of Braceweight's 'colourless persistence' (169). The godfather role is eventually filled for Charles by Mr Blearney, 'who combined a hearty manner with genuine self-confidence' (100). Braceweight's financial and professional success in sales is attributed to the sacrifice of his core of personal identity: he is no role model of authentic selfhood for a young man. Amidst the legions of those willing to make this sacrifice, however, is Stan, Charles's girlfriend Rosa's brother, who is introduced as follows:

At sixty, Stan would have neither the massive good humour nor the genuine dignity of his father, and already he was immersed in learning the technique of cheap smartness. He talked a different language, for one thing; it was demotic English of the mid-twentieth

century, rapid, slurred, essentially a city dialect and, in origin, essentially American. (185)

A vast number of social and moral assessments are implicit here: the nobility of the traditional working-class patriarch, the betrayal of your (working-) class inherent in social aspiration, the undesirability of smartness that comes cheap, and of a verbal idiom rooted in the big city, and a transatlantic city at that. Although *Hurry on Down* rejects the 'hero as retrospective narrator' device of *Scenes from Provincial Life* for the omniscient author of conventional realism, the mechanism of the coercion of the reader into an acceptance of these implied principles is still in operation. Mr Blearney's role as patriarchal godfather is finally confirmed when he responds to Charles's question 'What do you think I want?' as follows:

'Neutrality,' said Mr Blearney calmly and without pausing to take thought.

Charles looked at him in silence.

'Go on, partner, tell me it isn't true, if you can,' said Mr Blearney. 'It's the type who wants neutrality who comes into our racket. Doesn't want to take sides in all the silly pettiness that goes on. Doesn't want to spend his time scratching and being scratched. Wants to live his own life.'

Charles was humbled. The man understood him perfectly. His very choice of a word was absolutely right. (248)

For 'neutrality' (implying a receptivity to a range of different viewpoints) we can rather substitute 'authenticity', defined as the empirical demonstration of an essential selfhood, a man who can 'live his own life' without the hindrance of a sensitivity to relativity. Blearney's 'neutrality' is objectivity, and Joe

Lunn's 'consistency'. Such empiricism, of course, requires *emotional* neutrality, and *Hurry on Down* may be read as the story of Charles's quest to conquer the irrational passions and jealousies of his love for Veronica ('the knowledge that Veronica was Roderick's mistress had been there all along, in his bones, in his arms and legs, in the blood in his veins', 161-62) with rational control. The novel has a happy ending in this respect: while welcoming her back into his arms, and listening to her speech of regret, 'mentally he translated this into: *You're rich now, you're doing as well as Roderick. And you're fifteen years younger*' (251).

Parallel to this movement from emotion to reason is Charles's gradual rejection of his initial attraction to the mindless communality of working-class professions: he moves instead towards a more 'modern' vision of community, a purportedly 'classless' society, which fosters and supports individual, intellectual advancement. It took Harold Macmillan in 1959 to announce conclusively that the class war was over and won, but as Elizabeth Wilson notes in *Women and the Welfare State*, 'The Welfare State is one very important way in which a belief is fostered that our society is in fact "classless", that "we are all middle class now"' (11). This shift from socialist collective to capitalist meritocracy retains a lingering respect for the working classes (the 'honest labourer' long the pin-up boy of authenticity for middle-class liberalism), while ultimately rejecting their socially-divisive

solidarity for the assumed meritocracy of middle-class intellectualism. Just as a masculine code of judgement is presented as being universal, so being middle-class is figured to be class-neutral. At the beginning of *Hurry on Down*, Charles's imminent certainty of vomiting after a bout of heavy drinking is an unlikely prompt towards an epiphany: 'Could he not, just as easily, cast up and be rid of his class, his *milieu*, his insufferable load of presuppositions and reflexes?' (30). His very use of the word 'milieu' is testament to the fact that Charles will, of course, never leave his middle-class point of view, as his sense of self is so inextricably bound to it. After his success at cleaning windows, Charles rejects a properly working-class celebration and chooses a meal and a nice claret at the Grand Hotel, recognising his actions as 'ritual gestures, to clutch at the rags of his self-respect' (75). His final career choice – competitive masculine bantering as joke-writer for a radio show – neatly combines wit and independence with communal warmth and appreciation. The paradox of the masculine self – isolation and rationality recognised and validated only by a community of those with emotional and practical investments in the maintenance of that selfhood – is replicated once again.

Alan Sillitoe's novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) serves well to emphasize the middle-class nature of this masculine community, and the role of the working-class male within its iconography. The novel is

striking in its determined use of the universal 'you' idiom; 'You followed the motto of "be drunk and be happy", kept your crafty arms around female waists, and felt the beer going beneficially down into the elastic capacity of your guts' (5);

At a piecework rate of four-and-six a hundred you could make your money if you knocked-up fourteen hundred a day – possible without grabbing too much – and if you went all out for a thousand in the morning you could dawdle through the afternoon and lark about with the women and talk to your mates now and again (24);

And in the evening, when admittedly you would be feeling as though your arms and legs had been stretched to breaking point on a torture-rack, you stepped out into a cosy world of pubs and noisy tarts that would one day provide you with the raw material for more pipedreams as you stood at your lathe. (31)

With a middle-class reader as its ideal, the novel's narrative voice works hard to create empathy with an unfamiliar working-class environment, an empathy which stems, it is subtly suggested, both from intellectualism and liberal generosity.

The text demonstrates two modes of narration. The first is a free indirect discourse in Arthur Seaton's brutal idiom, deliberately creating the thrill of the unfettered expression of misogyny through a primal mouthpiece: 'Dave got a woman into trouble who had turned out to be the worst kind of tart, a thin, vicious, rat-faced whore who tried to skin him for every penny he'd got – until he threatened to chuck her over Trent Bridge one dark night, and she settled for a quid a week out of court' (65). Misogyny, of course, is



as much a middle-class masculine trait as a working-class one, but the distance created by Arthur's subaltern position licences its expression in a more violent way, in what Anthony Hartley recognises in a footnote to be 'that vicarious enjoyment of the bloody by the bloodless' (132). The novel's second mode of narration is a descriptive, controlling narrative voice located as firmly in a middle-class intellectual discourse as Charles Lumley's 'milieu': 'Arthur was stirred by the sound of breaking glass: it synthesised all the anarchism within him, was the most perfect and suitable noise to accompany the end of the world and himself' (93). This second voice constantly distinguishes itself from its primal partner by reinforcing the idea of male working-class existence as non-intellectual, as when Arthur lies to Jack, whom he is cuckolding: 'It was simple and explicit, because he had not thought about it. If he gave things too much thought they did not turn out so well' (45). Manual labour is explicitly linked with male virility, as Arthur admonishes himself for daydreams about sex with Brenda while working his lathe: 'Only less of this or there'll be another handle on the lathe that I won't know what to do with and another gallon of suds that will jam the works' (31). The novel's portrayal of a traditional working-class masculinity ruled by survival instincts and pleasure principles is designed to provide a rest-cure from contemporary middle-class manhood, as rehabilitating as Lumley's spell cleaning windows. The pain-staking reconstruction of a



stereotypical working-class masculinity founded on mindless virility and violence allows the reader the thrill of the wild while reinscribing a sense of the power of essential manhood. The knowing intellectual commentary upon Arthur's primal motivations simultaneously allows membership of Knight's club of 'superior vision', providing a sense of rational narrative control.

Rather than expanding male fiction with empathetic heroes drawn from disadvantaged environments, Sillitoe produces another example of middle-class masculine protectionism: as Nigel Gray notes in his discussion of the novel in *The Silent Majority: A Study of the Working-Class in Post-War British Fiction*, 'Sillitoe is too much taken with the working-class hero cult' (113). The terms of this cult allow an unusually appreciative assessment of Arthur's appearance in the controlling narrative, just as they allowed George Orwell in his 1937 *The Road to Wigan Pier* to lavish description upon the 'small pronounced buttocks and sinewy thighs' of miners below ground (20). These lingering looks are also licensed in the free indirect discourse sections by the narcissism of Arthur's teddy-boy tendencies which allow the cataloguing of his hair styles and outfits. Arthur falls down the stairs of the White Horse after eleven pints of beer and seven gins, and there is a moment of stillness which invites the reader and a nearby observer to dwell on his exterior: 'It was a waiter, towel in one hand and tray in the other, white

jacket open from overwork, a face normally blank but now expressing some character because he had begun to worry about this tall, iron-faced, crop-haired youth lying senseless at his feet' (7-8). With one exception, exteriority is the extent of the novel's descriptions of Arthur Seaton. In its project of reinscribing working-class male mindlessness, and an accompanying reluctance to address the nature of an alternative selfhood, the text makes only the vaguest references to the reality of Arthur's subjectivity, as here, where Brenda is 'bringing off' her pregnancy in a hot bath: 'Sometimes he was part of the scene, sitting among the two women, warmed by the fire, choked by the steaming bath; then he was looking down on it, like watching the telly with no part in what he was seeing. He was only real inside himself' (75). The only time the novel abandons free indirect discourse for unmediated access to Arthur's interior monologue, he merely reiterates the platitudes of the young working-class rebel that have been explicit in the rest of the text: 'Once a rebel, always a rebel. You can't help being one. You can't deny that. And it's best to be a rebel so as to show 'em it don't pay to try to do you down' (176-77).

Arthur Seaton, established as instinctual rather than rational, is excluded by the masculine text from a privileged position over his own selfhood. This privilege belongs solely to the middle-class reader, who accepts it with an implicit recognition of the superiority of rational control

over emotional or impulsive drives; a particularly masculine hierarchical binarism. In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, the class divide between the hero and the narrative voice draws attention to a gulf between the hero and his explanation, and between knowledge and self-knowledge, which, though still present, is not as obvious in *Scenes From Provincial Life*, with its ubiquitous rational, middle-class register. Instability is apparent in the midst of this empiricism. In *The English Novel in History: 1950-1995*, Steven Connor attributes this instability to what he terms the 'addressivity' of narrative:

With this term, I mean to evoke not just the tendency of narratives to surmise or otherwise orientate themselves towards certain receivers or addressees but also the associated effects of recoil and redoubling, whereby the narrative may be seen to acknowledge, or even react against the knowledge of that address. It may be useful here to distinguish between 'address' and 'addressivity'. The addressivity of a text concerns not only the kinds of reader or reading it may seem to imply or require – for this I would employ the term 'address' – but also the manner in which the text may reflect on these acts of address. The analysis of addressivity would thus attempt to describe the recoil and impacting of the conditions of address upon the text itself. (10-11)

This chapter has provided an analysis of the way in which the masculine text addresses (and thereby immasculates) its readers. In uncovering some of the anxiety within that text over the paradox that the essential, empirical self should need to be defined and recruited for in this way, it has also begun to address these texts' addressivity. Further anxiety might also be expected over the medium in which this paradigm of selfhood is established – language. In *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern*

*Identity*, Charles Taylor acknowledges the referential nature of selfhood in his statement that it 'exists only within what I call "webs of interlocution"' (36).

He claims:

To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand. (27)

Like that of Fish, his definition of self-definition draws attention to the mechanisms of address, to the appeal to a shared (or imposed) sense of 'what is good or valuable' and 'what I endorse or oppose'. It is also interesting to note the way in which his chosen metaphors are so determinedly spatial and situational. If language is the medium of selfhood, the empirical standards of that ideal self are compromised.

### **Addressivity, Anxiety and Influence**

Kingsley Amis's 1954 novel *Lucky Jim*, through the functioning of its plot, its narrative technique, and the critical attention surrounding it, provides another demonstration of the post-war desire for peer recognition and validation of a self constructed upon masculine principles and the manifestation of this desire in a particular mode of address. The novel evinces an awareness of a double selfhood – the 'real I' inside, and the

exterior self compromised into civility and sacrifice – years before Laing's diagnosis of the phenomenon in his study of schizophrenia, *The Divided Self* (1960). The extent to which this sham-self/real-self divide is justifiable by contemporary social conditions is portrayed in the novel to be heavily gender-dependent. Jim Dixon's compromised self-awareness is treated with the cheerful fatalism characteristic of Amis's work: 'He'd been drawn into the Margaret business by a combination of virtues he hadn't known he possessed: politeness, friendly interest, ordinary concern, a good-natured willingness to be imposed upon, a desire for unequivocal friendship' (10). Dixon's sham-self is a necessary evil for him to function in his current milieu, and the comic dynamo behind the plot: his quest is to discover another, utopian milieu in which he will be at liberty to do nice things rather than obliged constantly to do nasty ones. The comedy only occasionally gives way to flashes of regret at his inauthenticity, as when Margaret 'switched back to him with a little smile which he recognized, with self-dislike, as consciously brave' (20). This 'self-dislike', presumably, stems from the recognition of his own reflex to assess the co-ordination in others of their exterior and interior selves, thus emphasising the discrepancies of his own experience. It is certainly not prompted by guilt over thinking ill about Margaret. Her own self-dramatization is a source of constant annoyance to Jim – 'Don't be fantastic, Margaret. Come off the stage for a moment, do'



(159) – as it is just another facet of her regrettable adherence to a desiccated, out-dated and inauthentic femininity: ‘Her hair had been recently washed; it lay in dry lustreless wisps on the back of her neck. In that condition it struck him as quintessentially feminine, much more feminine than the Callaghan girl’s shining fair crop’ (76). Musing upon Christine Callaghan’s relationship with Bertrand Welch, Jim neatly sums up the double-standard of the double-self: ‘All the same, what messes these women got themselves into over nothing. Men got themselves into messes too, and ones that weren’t so easily got out of, but their messes arose from attempts to satisfy real and simple needs’ (116). Jim’s inauthenticity of self, it is stressed here, stems from a deeply authentic need to survive amidst social codes hostile to young men – Christine’s (and Margaret’s) from a loss of rational control.

This gender divide is emphasized by the narrative technique of the novel itself. In his book *Kingsley Amis*, Richard Bradford notes how *Lucky Jim* contains a narrative which functions in two modes:

It is as though there are two Jims: one inside the narrative, struggling with his own impatience, frustration and feelings of contempt; the other controlling and orchestrating the narrative, ensuring that the reader will share his perspective – on the idiocies of the Welches and the pretensions of Bertrand and Margaret. (12)

*Lucky Jim*’s free indirect discourse is thus doubly compelling for the agenda of creating and recruiting for a community based on masculine principles. The narrative synthesizes two positions: Jim’s idiom inside the story,



frustrated and amusing, and the third-person narrator outside it, controlling ideal reader-responses to characters and events. The reader gets to share all the jokes amidst an atmosphere of bantering camaraderie, identifying with Jim's entrapment and empathizing with his quest. By identifying with the authoritative narrative voice, s/he also takes up a place in the seat of judgement, at the site of sense-making. Amis modifies Cooper's template of the retrospective narrative, maintaining the sense of rational control while amplifying the atmosphere of clubby partiality in what Bradford refers to later as a 'shifty alliance' (17). In Amis's essay 'Real and Made-Up People', the author idealises the propensity of this combination of empathy and rationality between writer and character and reader, upholding it as a means of self-revelation for all interested parties:

By that very act of distancing, by projecting himself into an entity that is part of himself and yet not himself, he may be able to see more clearly, and judge more harshly, his own weaknesses and follies; and, since he must know that no failings are unique, he may be helped to acquire tolerance for them in others. In the second place, if the novel comes off at all, the reader will perhaps accompany the writer in some parallel process of self-discovery. (25)

Amis here suggests an emotional honesty and moral judgement in his treatment of the hero that *Lucky Jim* fails to deliver. On the rare occasions that Jim's emotional state is mentioned, it is with reference to the physical consequences of his emotions, which are always uncomfortable, as here in reaction to his attraction to Christine: 'He wanted to implode his features, to

crush air from his mouth, in a way and to a degree that might be set against the mess of feelings she aroused in him: indignation, grief, resentment, peevishness, spite, and sterile anger, all the allotropes of pain' (72). Adhering to a masculine agenda, Jim's 'mess' of feelings appear in the text as anything but messy: their neat list provides, the reader is assured, a comprehensive inventory of a qualifiable elemental experience. Feminine emotion yields to masculine organisation. Elsewhere in the clubby dictatorship of the free indirect discourse, the reader is simultaneously invited and given no option but to share Jim's relief at his avoidance of any participation in feelings: 'He began eating the largest surviving gherkin and thought how lucky he was that so much of the emotional business of the evening had been transacted without involving him directly' (21).

So the interiority of the narrative technique of the novel is notable for its determined avoidance of intimate revelation. Likewise, the 'exterior' element that controls the judgement of the reader towards the female characters and the subaltern males of the plot avoids exercising its assumed rationality upon itself, despite Amis's intimations of self-analysis above. In his examination of the period's novels in *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s*, Blake Morrison deems a democratic cast of characters to be a necessary fictional response to the prevalent social philosophy: 'What was needed from writers was the suggestion that in a Welfare State

democracy everyone was of equal importance, that everyone had an equally vital part to play: "Exit the hero" (172). Tempting though it might be to read Jim Dixon and his peers in male-authored novels of the period as part of a universal striving towards a classless meritocracy, the hero has evidently not made his exit in *Lucky Jim*. Though Amis's plots, in *Lucky Jim* and elsewhere, honour the prevalent social philosophy of the Welfare State, transgressing class boundaries, and celebrating hypergamy and the new opportunities afforded by a better education, his fictional form is disposed against it. The novel works hard to ensure that no viewpoint other than Jim's is even momentarily viable without excommunication from the literary text. Christine, gradually proven to be a suitable mate for Jim, is suitable precisely because of her irrational and peachy 'naturalness'. Within the heterosexual codes of masculine desire, this otherness allows her to function as both complimentary to Jim's state of necessarily compromised self-awareness, and utterly discredited by it. Apart from Jim's friends, Atkinson and Beesely (identifiable as such because, together with Christine, they are the only characters to address him as 'Jim'), who operate as plot facilitators rather than characters, all subalterns in the novel are ruthlessly bashed. At one point, Jim's guide to survival is summarised as follows: 'The one indispensable answer to an environment bristling with people and things one thought were bad was to go on finding out new ways in which one could

think they were bad' (129). This, too, provides an insight into the novel's technique of the discreditation of subaltern characters. A triumphant example comes at the end, when Professor and Bertrand Welch are described as having 'a look of being Gide and Lytton Strachey, represented in waxwork form by a prentice hand' (251). The description contains a quadruply-reductive whammy of insults: the two men look out-dated, they look homosexual, they look artificial, and their artifice looks to be of poor craftsmanship. As in *Scenes From Provincial Life*, discreditation on the 'major' counts is enhanced and echoed by a code of superficial but influential judgements on each character's appearance: Margaret wears too much make-up and has lipstick smeared on her teeth, for example, Bertrand Welch wears a beret, and Johns cuts his hair (incompetently) himself. One way in which Christine is encoded as desirable is by a reference to her lack of lipstick, and the longing that this prompts once again results in Jim's physical incapacity: 'She stared at him, her full, dry lips slightly apart. A pang of helpless desire made Dixon feel heavy and immovable' (218).

*Lucky Jim* also provides an instructive example of the way in which critical and media attention surrounding the work of young male novelists during the 1950s was united in strengthening the sense of a young middle-class masculine community. Contemporary reviews were quick to point out that Dixon's position as lecturer-on-probation at a provincial university was

not dissimilar to that of Amis. The review of *Lucky Jim* in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 12 February 1954 placed the novel firmly within a specific genre identified by the status and origins of the authors purveying it, saying of Jim:

He is the anti-, or rather, sub-hero who is beginning to figure increasingly as the protagonist of the most promising novels written by young men since the war – in, for example, the work of Mr Ernest Frost, Mr William Cooper, and Mr John Wain – an intelligent provincial who, after getting a scholarship and an Oxford or Cambridge degree, finds his social position both precarious and at odds with his training. (101)

Five decades later there remains a tendency to read the hero as contiguous with the author: in his introduction to the 1998 collection *Critical Essays on Kingsley Amis*, editor Robert Bell notes: 'In many of his narratives, Amis seems massively ubiquitous, his characters articulating the author's likes and dislikes' (2). Thus a reference in *Lucky Jim* to 'some skein of untiring facetiousness by filthy Mozart' (63) is repeatedly read not as a hung-over Jim's grumpy response to the whistling of someone he hates from a bathroom he needs to access, but an Amisian rejection of all things high-brow. A similarly avid identification occurred between John Osborne and the hero of his 1956 play *Look Back in Anger*, spearheaded with some determination by Kenneth Tynan in the *Observer*. In his book *Success Stories: Literature and the Media in England, 1950-1959*, Harry Ritchie notes how the assertions by critics of a direct link between the author, the hero, and the



reader become self-fulfilling prophecies: 'Eventually, the very popularity of their books – itself caused by the discussion and controversy inspired by assumptions of their representative status – was taken as clinching proof that these new writers had appealed to, and now represented, a new readership' (209). Ritchie is adamant that *Look Back in Anger*, for example, did not represent a deliberate political statement: in other words, Osborne did not set out to preach a new agenda of anger in response to the apathy engendered by the lack of good, brave causes. Although Amis can similarly be pronounced free from recreating the agenda of a particular political party in *Lucky Jim*, the novel and the hype surrounding it can be interpreted as part of a wider political project.

In an era of accelerated social change, the text of *Lucky Jim* and the other novels examined in this chapter work to reinscribe masculine superiority by inculcating masculine principles of selfhood through their narrative technique. This project is amplified by an interpretative community intent upon reading the literary heroes of contemporary works as in some way 'new' and excitingly realist, when the values they represent are in fact profoundly traditional and protectionist. Further, the dogged identification of hero with author, and reader with both hero and author, increases the communal buzz of belonging. Both *Lucky Jim* and *Look Back in Anger* are profoundly political in their simultaneous dependence upon, and



determination to create, a community based upon masculine hierarchical binaries, and in their portrayal of that community as unquestionably universal. Idealist literary propaganda was advertised as realism by a media loyal to the cause with a vehemence redolent of the inherent instability of the whole project.

The ultimate means of enforcing identification within and surrounding this narrative, though, is language itself, and it is the instability inherent in language that ultimately demonstrates the instability of *Lucky Jim*'s masculine community and its text; its 'addressivity'. Ritchie notes a critical tendency to make 'blithe assumptions about the Movement authors being influenced by Logical Positivism' (176-77). *Lucky Jim* can and has been read in this way: an attempt to banish the mysticism of metaphysical, theological and ethical propositions with a language founded upon the empirical. Branding this genre of fiction as empirical, of course, suggests that a novel's assumptions are immediately verifiable from the experience of every reader – another means of defining and reinforcing the ideal masculine community. Language is imbued with a rational cynicism deemed appropriate for the new, practical social vision: in *In Anger: Culture and the Cold War 1945-60*, Robert Hewison identifies in Philip Larkin's work 'an "oh-now-come-off-it" tone also heard in Kingsley Amis' (121). Jim's retort to

Bertrand after knocking him down functions as an empirical linguistic epiphany:

It was clear that Dixon had won this round, and, it then seemed, the whole Bertrand match. He put his glasses on again, feeling good; Bertrand caught his eye with a look of embarrassed recognition. The bloody old towser-faced boot-faced totem-pole on a crap reservation, Dixon thought. 'You bloody old towser-faced boot-faced totem-pole on a crap reservation,' he said. (209)

Having translated a long-seething desire into a physical act, Jim's inner and outer selves coincide, and he finally says what he thinks. Thereafter the plot accelerates towards utopia. Yet what do Jim's divided selves coincide to produce? The insult inarguably provides a rush of comic and linguistic verve, but even amidst this novelistic trope's codes of value judgements occasionally puzzling in their randomness (suede shoes = homosexuality, for example), it is deeply obscure; unlikely to mean anything specific to the reader, and least of all to the rarefied Bertrand Welch.

The limits of what Anthony Hartley refers to as Jim's 'technique of limited revolt' (149) become still more conspicuous in the book's comic climax, the Merrie England lecture. This also represents the climax of anxiety over a lack of linguistic control, and the climax, in Harold Bloom's phrase, of an 'anxiety of influence' over the impossibility of the young male rebel escaping the patriarchal establishment. According to the 'totem-pole epiphany' reading, Dixon is by this stage of the novel in an enviable state of

utter confidence in his selfhood and his own ability to express that selfhood in language, yet at the podium:

When he'd spoken about half a dozen sentences, Dixon realized that something was still very wrong. The murmuring in the gallery had grown a little louder. Then he realized what it was that was so wrong: he'd gone on using Welch's manner of address. In an effort to make his script sound spontaneous, he'd inserted an 'of course' here, a 'you see' there, an 'as you might call it' somewhere else; nothing so firmly recalled Welch as that sort of thing. (223)

(It is interesting that here the final phrase 'that sort of thing' actually makes the register of the novel complicit with those it seeks to criticise.) Jim continues:

He cleared his throat, found his place, and went on in a clipped tone, emphasizing all the consonants and keeping his voice well up at the end of each phase. At any rate, he thought, they'll hear every word now. As he went on, he was for the second time conscious of something being very wrong. It was some moments before he realized that he was now imitating the Principal. (224)

Public discourse has become, in the mouths of the older male generation, utterly inauthentic: Jim is serially possessed by the speech idioms of the professional superiors he holds in such contempt. Rather than his sacking, it is this revelation that will free him to renounce his academic career without regret. Kim L. Worthington notes our contemporary conception in the wake of theorists like Derrida and Lacan that subjectivity derives from intersubjectivity: 'I speak myself, to myself and to others, in the language of others' (5). The model of the masculine self provided in *Lucky Jim* flatly

denies this intersubjectivity: it assumes a pre-linguistic, 'finished' self, the authenticity of which is severely compromised by its expression in 'the language of others'.

Revealingly, though, Jim's only alternative to the mimicry of his patriarchs is a slight change of tone: 'No more imitations, they frightened him too much, but he could suggest by his intonation, very subtly of course, what he thought of his subject and the worth of the statements he was making' (225). This is the extent of Jim's rebellion: a sarcastic tone of voice. His future holds a career under Gore-Urquhart, the novel's deeply ambiguous 'fairy-godfather' figure who, although nicely removed from the networks of nepotism of the English upper-classes by virtue of his Scottishness, reveals that his success is based precisely on a technique of verbal manipulation, attempts at which Jim had previously found so repulsive in Margaret:

I want to influence people so they'll do what I think it's important they should do. I can't get 'em to do that unless I let 'em bore me first, you understand. Then just as they're delighting in having got me punch-drunk with talk I come back at 'em and make 'em do what I've got lined up for 'em. (215)

Confronted at the novel's conclusion with the two male Welches, both in preposterous hats, and triumphant with Christine on his arm, Jim is still unable to formulate any complete verbal response whatsoever:

'You're....' he said. 'He's....'

The Welches withdrew and began getting into their car. Moaning, Dixon allowed Christine to lead him away up the street.

The whinnying and clanging of Welch's self-starter began behind them, growing fainter and fainter as they walked on until it was altogether overlaid by the other noises of the town and by their own voices. (251)

The couple's voices may be overlaying the noise of the Welches, but the reader cannot hear those voices, and Jim is off to London (the metropolitan centre in opposition to which his heroic credentials were originally defined) to cultivate his sham-self for financial gain. Offered up as the culmination of the quest of a rebellious 'new man', Jim Dixon's utopian ending turns out to be a compromise with patriarchal power-structures and the restrictions of a self fissured with the debilitating paradoxes of masculinity.

Kingsley Amis's 1960 novel *Take a Girl Like You* nicely demonstrates an increasingly confident masculine literary technique of 'othering' all other male characters with reference to clubby codes of discreditation. Jazz is upheld as indicative of the insider knowledge required to identify with Movement males, and those who reject the art-form are ruthlessly excluded from a number of jokes in the novel: 'The music played. It was East Coast stuff, carphology in sound. After a frugal tune had twice been announced in unison, an alto saxophone offered a sixty-four bar contribution to the permanent overthrow of melody' (269). More striking than this ostentatious clubbiness, though, are the invidious codes of discrimination in the novel.



Here, for example, Graham McClintoch, friend of the hero Patrick Standish, says of Dick Thompson: 'I shall never forget the time I offered him a packet with two in it and he took one between his ring and little fingers because he'd got a pork pie in that hand and a pint I'd bought him in the other' (75). To share the humour, the ideal reader will extrapolate the following assumptions:

1. The packet contains cigarettes, and cigarettes are desirable, and expensive, commodities.
2. The older Dick's taking the cigarette demonstrates his greed and failure to adhere to the codes of reciprocity of the young male community.
3. The way he holds the cigarette is comically ungainly and also effeminate (the latter charge is to be confirmed later in the novel on the revelation of Dick's inability to conceive a child).
4. The pork pie is again indicative of Dick's greed and of his lack of sophistication.
5. The pint, again, is desirable, expensive, and unreciprocated.

(Graham, although here in the moral ascendancy, is himself neutralised as a potential threat to the superiority of Patrick's viewpoint by discreditation with reference to his red hair, unattractive facial features and Scottish pronunciation, which the novel inscribes both as comical, and indicative of a



dour attitude stereotypical of his race.)

### **Good, Clean, Rational Fun**

Such codes are becoming familiar to us. *Take a Girl Like You* is notable, however, for its innovations in the Amisian scheme of selfhood, and the relationship between that selfhood and morality. Written on the brink of the decade which was to redefine sexuality as the foundation of the authentic self rather than an embarrassing primal urge to be ignored, the novel attempts to create a sexual morality for the changing social climate around the essentialist creed that 'What people do doesn't change their nature' (316). The massive intellectual upheaval of the post-war period in Britain – gradual revelation of the reality of the death camps, and the exposure of the nation's self-nominated position of moral leader as fraudulent – had unsettlingly demonstrated morality to be heavily context-dependent. *Take a Girl Like You* attempts to counteract this doubt by binding its 'new' sexual morality to the notion of an essential selfhood. (A similar priority might be read into the 1960s British literary project to rehabilitate D. H. Lawrence as a revelational moralist.) Philip Oakes's identikit for the Welfare State Englishman in the *Observer*, 1 January 1956, concludes its list of defining characteristics with 'Interests: people, money, sex. Worries: money, sex' (8). For the masculine text, sex is similarly fraught with both fascination and anxiety. Allsop is

vociferous in his demands that Osborne fulfil the social obligations necessitated by his literary creativity, and the metaphor he uses (albeit a disquieting exhibition of his sexual neuroses) is instructive:

Osborne must accept the situation in which he finds himself – that he has the ear of a generation and, having stirred up their feelings far more excitingly than he could ever have dreamed he would do, he cannot resign from the job and leave it to others to ‘fill the void’. Or at least, he can – but that is an abnegation of a writer’s responsibility, the kind of sly artistic titillation without orgasm that belongs more to the *Silk Stockings* magazine or a strip-tease show than to the legitimate stage. (131-32)

The arousal of identification, Allsop asserts, makes narrative fulfilment a moral obligation: this is indicative of a perception that both literary form and sexual desire are inescapably linear. In other words, we might expect this literary trope to portray sexuality, if it does so at all, as compliant with the pre-established narrative paradigm of the masculine text. This is an anxious negotiation. The very inclusion of sexuality within that text is a risk, as sex involves an automatic association with the female. Osborne notes of the degenerate gender in ‘What’s Gone Wrong with Women?’ that ‘Her roots are so deep in sexuality that she is the natural enemy of the visionary, the idealist’ (257). The traditional binary marks sexuality as feminine and emotional, the antithesis of the rational self. To neutralize, or rather, to masculinize the threat, sex in these novels must be made empirical. In a review of *Take a Girl Like You* in the *Daily Express* on 22 September 1960, Peter

Forster renames its author as 'Kinsey Amis' (16), acknowledging the novel's intentions toward the kind of demystification of sexual relationships achieved by the 1948 report. *Take a Girl Like You* determinedly couches sexual urges as 'natural' for men, demonstrated by means of Patrick's cheerful and wordy proclamations that sexual pleasure is simple and simply reciprocated. There are frequent and darker glimpses, however, of a libido that is a primal, and dangerous, masculine force. Able Seaman Jackson delivers one of his regular, drunken news bulletins outside Jenny's window that modern marriage is no more than 'legalized bloody prostitution' (22). Julian Omerod notes of Patrick's breezy dismissal of the strip club they are patronizing as 'good clean fun':

Exactly. That's the whole idea. Wouldn't do at all if it set a pulse beating in your temple and your knuckles whitening under the strain. [...] Of course, it wouldn't be the thing for most of our fellow-members and guests if there actually were some real nudity here. They want a demonstration of how clean and straightforward and entertaining and part-of-a-spending-spree and good-fun-for-all-concerned sex *really* is, not all those peculiar old other things they're liable to suspect it may possibly be when they read the *News of the World*, or pass a girls' school at playtime, or cut across the common last thing at night. (211-12)

This points up the paradox of the use of the concept of the 'natural' in the service of codes of masculine priority: it can be linked to essential manhood and used in opposition to the inauthenticity of femininity, but it is unable to shake the consequences of its more traditional position within the binary

epistemology: man = civilised and rational, woman = natural and chaotic.

The chief problem identified in the novel is that sex has become commercialized, fetishized and corrupted. However, the underlying sexual violence functions in a similar way to Arthur Seaton's brutality – a lingering primal thrill in the midst of a contemporary and consensual rationality.

Patrick's sunny approach to sex is also darkened by his repeated tendency, like that of Jim Dixon, to link desire to pain and the oblivion of death, encouraged by contact with figures like Lord Edgerstoune, a human memento mori, who excuses his lechery as a defence against death: 'When I put my arm round Nancy's waist and give her a little kiss on the ear, or something like that, I'm testing for a tingling, that's all. Seeing if there's any juice left' (242). Patrick's bouts of existential nausea are prompted by desire, or rather by an association of sensuality with irrationality, of sexuality with the surrender of the (rational) self.

The fact that sexuality remains fraught with intimations of the female means that Patrick attempts to argue Jenny into bed using two opposing positions; that sex is natural and fun, and her reluctance towards it stems from the imposition of an 'unnatural' moral code, and that advances in contraception must force her to overcome her 'natural' concerns about pregnancy. He tells her:

It's because you've had the kind of upbringing – very excellent in its way, I'm not saying anything against it – but it's the kind with the old idea of girls being virgins when they get married behind it. Well, that was perfectly sensible in the days when there wasn't any birth control and they thought they could tell when a girl wasn't a virgin.

Nowadays they know they can't and so everything's changed. You're not running any risk at all. (63)

Yet this traditional code of seduction, which Jenny summarizes as '(chap) *I like you and (girl) I like you but*' (40), still holds elsewhere in the novel, as

Patrick is repulsed by the 'unnaturally' eager Anna (her role as sexual predator later revealed to be a front for a lack of self-confidence), and unable to achieve an erection with the indifferently amenable Joan. Jenny needs to change her celibate instinct to allow her to have sex with Patrick, but other instincts within her are commended for their accuracy. Handed a cup of tea by Dick Thompson, she admits to a 'natural feeling that men should not do things like seeing to the tea when there was a woman at hand to do it' (34).

As we have seen, her suspicion that Dick is unmanly is confirmed by the masculine codes of discreditation in the novel. Although the free indirect discourse of the text alternates between the assumed perspectives and speech patterns of Jenny and Patrick, predictably, it is the male viewpoint which is shown as closer to absolute truth. The risk to masculine supremacy of an alternative point of view in the novel through Jenny's free indirect discourse sections is repeatedly neutralized by this benevolent compliance with the codes of value of the young male community: 'Now that she was more used



to Patrick Standish's appearance and manner they seemed quite attractive, and intellectual rather than sissy – the two were sometimes hard to tell apart' (18). Female sexuality is policed to ensure that it conforms to masculine-dictated hierarchies of heterosexual desirability:

Most of the time they sat and listened, or perhaps went down to the bar for a drink in more comfort and to play one of their games. In the smasher-maybe-and-dud one – she had told him how she divided men up, and he had got very interested straight away – she would guess the rating of some girl there or that they knew, and he would say how it stood up to a man's rating, and then he would start with a man. They hardly ever differed more than one point. (180)

The rape scene is narrated in the idiom of a Jenny semi-comatose with drink and reliably indulgent towards Patrick, and it is she who later delivers a dreamy epitaph on the incident: 'I can't help feeling it's rather a pity' (317). Her position is a familiar one – speculum to masculine codes of value, in a project to couch a protectionist morality as progressive. Any intention to produce a *Clarissa* with morally repugnant anti-hero is not supported by the novel's narrative form. Its very title – *Take a Girl Like You* – contains a smutty in-joke available only to the ideal, immasculated reader.

Published in the same year (1960) as *Take a Girl Like You*, Stan Barstow's *A Kind of Loving* shares its interest in sex. Its working-class hero Vic Brown worries at the gulf between the language used to describe male sexuality and the actual experience of desire. In desiring him, and omitting to say '*I like you but*', his girlfriend Ingrid has reneged upon the traditional



heterosexual contract of man as seducer and woman as denier. Vic counteracts his anxiety by couching their situation in a more contemporary, and transatlantic discourse – the language, if not of pornography, then at least of pulp-fiction: ‘she’s a pretty hot bit of stuff. She gave me the green light okay the way she kissed me that night on the seat down there, or I’d never have gone as far as I did then’ (130); ‘A couple of days later I’m all for it again and feeling quite a lad about it. I feel like a proper man of the world with a willing bint laid on like this’ (187).

In adopting the language of commercialized sex, Vic is deceiving himself and betraying empiricism. Yet before the imposition of this inauthentic discourse, his narration of the loss of his virginity with Ingrid is riddled with romantic (and thus feminine) cliché and euphemism:

All I can think of is this is what I was born for, this is what I’ve been waiting for as long as I can remember. And that’s not all, because later, when my hand moves somewhere else, it’s as though she’s feeling just the same way as me, as though it’s what she’s been waiting for, because she quivers at my touch and sighs and then rests back in my arm and makes little noises in her throat as I love her like I never thought was possible except in imagination. (109)

Crucially, the first-person narration of the novel is in the present tense, and thus focalized through the confused, compromised and youthful Vic. This narrative voice is not completely innocent, however. It does make deliberate appeals for validation to its ideal and middle-class reader through a Hoggartian contempt for mass media’s corruption of the working-class

environment: "'Telly". I don't like that word somehow. It always reminds me of fat ignorant pigs of people swilling stout and cackling like hens at the sort of jokes they put on them coloured seaside postcards' (107). Yet, robbed of rational hindsight by the narrative's present tense, Vic is a subaltern narrator, his confusion over sexual relations appealing for empathy while simultaneously instigating superiority in the masculine reader. This textual tactic may seem risky, but within so powerfully imagined a community as that of masculine readers, the risk that the actual reader will not recognise their ideal relationship with the narrator is minimal. By the 1966 sequel *The Watchers on the Shore* any risk at all has been eradicated as Vic's voice, though still in the present tense, is tempered by a continual and cynical self-awareness:

When I say there's no hurry it's not the real reason I give her. The real reason is that a baby would put another chain round us, tie us a bit more firmly, and try as I might I can't help resisting this. There's a part of me under the daily routine, the settled surface of our marriage, that never accepts, that's always holding out against a final surrender to the facts. (22)

David Lodge's novel *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965)

functions as a parody of numerous literary modes, one of them the trope of novels examined in this chapter. Its hero, Adam Appleby (his very name, of course, jesting with his everyman status), remarks to his friend Camel of a rich (and portly) American he has extricated from a telephone booth: 'If I

was the hero of one of these comic novels [...] he would be the fairy-godfather who would turn up at the end to offer me a job and a girl. Don't suppose I shall ever see him again, actually' (74). (The American, of course, does reappear, and does offer him a job, at a salary that will at least allow him to buy a girl, his wife, a new coat.) When asked by a stranger in a crowded and noisy pub his opinion on 'Kingsley Anus', Adam replies, 'Oh, yes. I like his work. There are times when I think I belong to him more than to any of the others' (118). Lodge notes in his 1980 afterword to the novel how his own 'creative practice' was 'formed by the neo-realist, anti-modernist writing of the 1950s' (170). At a post-graduate sherry party, which Lodge describes as 'a kind of distillation of the post-Amis campus novel' (168), Adam perpetuates the illusion that this neo-realist fiction closes the gap between writing and reality:

Before the novel emerged as the dominant literary form, narrative literature dealt only with the extraordinary or the allegorical – with kings and queens, giants and dragons, sublime virtue and diabolic evil. There was no risk of confusing that sort of thing with life, of course. But as soon as the novel got going, you might pick up a book at any time and read about an ordinary chap called Joe Smith doing just the sort of things you did yourself. (118)

Published in 1965, the novel's setting, if not quite contemporaneous to its publication date, is set in the midst of Beatlemania (Adam becomes embroiled in a crowd of 'screaming, weeping teenagers' (32) on his way to Bloomsbury), and, by that token, after sexual intercourse (for Larkin), or, for

others, the sexual revolution, had begun. Adam is a practising Catholic, at least in the sense that he and his wife Barbara do not practice any artificial methods of contraception. The resultant retrograde nature of the couple's sexual preoccupations allows the narrative paradigm and priorities of the novel's 1950s predecessors still to function, even as they are parodied. *The British Museum is Falling Down* makes manifest the competing conceptions of sexuality as commonsensical requirement and irrational urge. The novel's epigraph is from Dr Johnson: 'I would be a Papist if I could. I have fear enough, but an obstinate rationality prevents me' (6), and Adam's conclusion over the Catholic rejection of preventative methods is that the use of contraception implies a pre-meditated sin, contradicting the Catholic requirement that sex is a spontaneous, violent libidinal desire (and thus an atoneable sin).

Though Adam's appreciation of the potential of contraception to rationalise sexual desire might initially make him seem qualified as a traditional hero of the masculine text, he differs from that typical hero in one important respect: he is married. Dominic Head notes of novels in the *Lucky Jim* style that: 'An interesting aspect of many of these novels is how the narrative impetus often colludes with adolescent male desires for sexual gratification or initiation, and a self-advancement that is linked to sexual assertiveness' (56). The 1950s plots of hypergamous seduction and personal

advancement are ultimately motivated by striving to take a girl, not continuing to keep a woman, your wife. *The British Museum is Falling Down* does imitate masculine hypergamous sexual selection in Adam's refusal of a teenage girl's advances in preference for his wife. Like the use of contraception, however, an established marriage, in its theoretical provision of sex-on-demand from the beginning of the novel, cannot conclude in a traditional, and masculine, happy ending of sexual conquest. Lodge emphasises this impossibility by concluding instead with the voice of a woman, Barbara, gratefully not pregnant, uttering the provisional 'perhaps' (161).

### **'Part-of-a-spending-spree'**

In John Braine's 1957 novel *Room at the Top*, masculine codes of value, both explicit and implied, are extended from people to possessions. The consumer boom of the post-war period demanded masculine mastery of an arena newly rampant and long considered to be feminized. *Which?* magazine, first appearing in 1957, attempted to bring some semblance of rational choice to the explosion of the consumer market. *Playboy*, which began publication in Britain in the 1950s, preached a conspicuously transatlantic but nonetheless highly relevant ethic of confidence in conspicuous consumption to the British male, off-setting any accusations of



feminized priorities or masculine narcissism by the liberal inter-leaving of consumer articles with visual opportunities to consume the female form. In her book *The Social Meaning of Money*, Viviana Zelizer notes how in early twentieth century America, a concept of 'cashworthiness' was prompted by new systems of relief: if consumer competence could be built through money, then cash dispensed to the poor was a therapeutic means of rehabilitating them back into society. Similarly, a man disorientated by the unfamiliar social conditions of the post-war Welfare State could, it was perceived, regain power through his purse, or rather wallet, by learning to spend and consume both effectively and ostentatiously. Early in the novel the narrator Joe Lampton boasts of his own particular skill in translating status symbols into hard cash: 'I've an instinct like a water-diviner's where money's concerned; I was certain that I was in the presence of at least a thousand a year' (15-16). The style of the earlier sections of the novel seeks to educate the reader in how to achieve this consumer savvy. In his essay on the James Bond series, 'Narrative Structures in Fleming', Umberto Eco notes of Fleming's tendency to catalogue the brand-names of possessions: 'Our credulity is solicited, blandished, directed to the region of possible and desirable things' (175). The same process is evident in *Room at the Top*: 'I wanted an Aston-Martin, I wanted a three-guinea linen shirt, I wanted a girl with a Riviera suntan – these were my rights, I felt, a signed and sealed legacy' (29). Joe lodges with



the Thompsons in a house in Cyprus Avenue in Warley, where:

The hall smelled of beeswax and fruit and there was a large copper vase of mimosa on a small oak table. Against the cream-painted walls I could see the faint reflection of the mimosa and the vase, chrome-yellow and near-gold; it looked almost too good to be true, like an illustration from *Homes and Gardens*. (10)

Joe says of Susan, the daughter of Warley's rich entrepreneur, that he was immediately attracted to her because she was 'conventionally pretty' (36).

The nature of these conventions is immediately made explicit: 'Black shoulder-length hair, large, round hazel eyes, neat nose and mouth, dimples – she was like the girl in the American advertisements who is always being given a Hamilton watch or Cannon Percle (whatever that is) Sheets or Nash Airflyte Eight' (36). Susan is being judged, and the reader is invited to judge her, by the conventions of advertising. This functions as an oblique comment upon the nature of Joe's desire for her, hinting that his attraction is despicably aspirational rather than admirably authentic. The consumer economy seeks continually to impose and reinforce a code of desirability: the thrill of recognition comes not from the potential consumer's own experience – to want to buy something you need to lack it – but from a dictated impression that the item is to be coveted. Rather than its perceived power to feminize (attributable in part to its previous social unimportance), perhaps the post-war rise of consumerism as a social dynamo is negotiated as a threat in male-authored novels of the period precisely because its mechanisms are

suspiciously close to those of the masculine self, and the means of portraying that self in fiction. Readers are coerced into the desirability of certain judgements with the promise of privilege; what are in reality arbitrary symbols (linen shirts, suede shoes, Aston Martins) are loaded with attendant values. The media of the consumer market – *Homes and Gardens*, for instance, or the (presumably cinematic) American advertisements – make the means of their coercion, or, in Steven Connor's terms, their 'addressivity', blatant. Commodity fetishism interferes with a direct empirical connection between appearance and reality; if, like the Thompson's entrance hall, things look 'almost too good to be true', then they probably are. *Room at the Top* was produced during an early stage of the cultivation of consumer literacy, and difficulties in reading this new set of signs draws attention not only to individual male incompetence, but also to the relativity of sign systems themselves. Fiction is thereby revealed as an unstable site for establishing an essential masculine selfhood.

Anxiety over this sense of consumer illiteracy is modified, however, by the mode of narration that Braine employs in the novel – the retrospective narrative recognisable from *Scenes from Provincial Life*. In this way, Joe's judgements of desirable possessions can be those not of an inexperienced young man, but a seasoned connoisseur, a successful purchaser empowered with the benefit of hindsight. Narrator-Joe notes of the young Joe's dressing

gown: 'The stitching was poor and after one washing it became a shapeless rag. It was a typical example of the stuff turned out for a buyer's market in the early post-war period and I rather think that I was drunk when I bought it' (13). (Intoxication is proffered as an added excuse for poor literacy skills.) In his chapter on the novel in *Writing Men*, Berthold Schoene-Harwood lauds this narrative technique, which he sees as 'introducing the perspective of a self-conscious inward gaze hitherto unprecedented in men's writing' (90), and apparent in passages from the novel such as this one:

I look back at that raw young man sitting miserable in the pub with a feeling of genuine regret; I wouldn't, even if I could, change places with him, but he was indisputably a better person than the smooth character I am now, after ten years of getting almost everything that I ever wanted. I know the name he'd give me: the Successful Zombie. (123)

*Room at the Top* is indeed notable for the way in which it foregrounds the processes of patriarchal and masculine conditioning, and this emphasis is heavily dependent upon the tool of the retrospective narrative, which allows the analysis of a boy's initiation into masculine adulthood from a male adult well-versed in its expectations and dividends. However, any sense of resistance to patriarchal prerogatives from a man in a position to rebel against them is dulled to the pervasive sense of malaise of a man long-since in a state of subservience. This sense of malaise may be unusual among male-authored novels of the period, but the plot and levels of rational

narratorial control remain identical to the other examples of peer patriarchal protectionism examined in this chapter. Radical tendencies are subsumed and compromised by the narrative mode itself. The anguish at the irreparable loss of the opportunity of authentic self-fashioning is effectively neutralized by the narrative tone of resigned retrospective analysis, and the novel ends just as Joe's agony and anger at Alice's death and society's refusal to implicate him in it requires full emotional expression:

Eva drew my head on to her breast. 'Poor darling, you mustn't take on so. You don't see it now, but it was all for the best. She'd have ruined your whole life. Nobody blames you, love. Nobody blames you.'

I pulled myself away from her abruptly. 'Oh my God,' I said, 'that's the trouble.' (235)

Having finally articulated the 'trouble' with contemporary male existence, Joe's voice is stopped.

The surrender of the possibility of an authentic male selfhood outside the dictates of masculinity results in resigned malaise rather than anguish precisely because of the impossibility of either expressing or defining what that selfhood might be. The deepest sense of loss in the novel surrounds the descriptions of Joe's relationship with Alice, a communing of equals which allows him to envisage a chance to 'enter into marriage, not just acquire a license for sexual intercourse' (173). The glimpses of human relativity, of the potential in sharing and surrender that his love allows him, is portrayed as

an experience of both relief and pain: 'We're all imprisoned within that selfish dwarf I – we love someone and we grow so quickly into human beings that it hurts' (180). A number of revealing assumptions about the nature of the self are apparent here. The self is rigid and constrictive, mean and small. It is 'selfish': inward-looking, isolated, insular. It exists in a state of binary opposition to love and its profoundly human state of messy relativity. By implication, 'that selfish dwarf I' is a masculine I, founded upon masculine codes of value. The novel reinscribes a traditional literary male paradox: the awareness of the inauthenticity of self is sported both as unique to male experience, and at the same time a facet of universal human experience. Alice both shares in Joe's sense of release from the unnatural codes of identity that her society places on her, and acts as the antithesis to his experience of selfhood, with her unfettered opinionatedness and sensuality.

As noted previously, the process of masculine self-recognition functions in a similar way to the means by which a consumer is positioned within a particular market. Both systems involve a relinquishing of individual choice and judgement for values dictated by an external influence. Both the consumer and masculine reflexes are dependent upon the correct perception and processing of external signs, and a suitable demonstration that this process has been completed successfully. Both patriarchy and



consumerism, as Schoene-Harwood points out, operate by remote control. During the central section of *Room at the Top*, as the relationship between Joe and Alice deepens to a point of reciprocity and mutual satisfaction, so the flurry of consumer judgements of the novel's opening slows. It is as if this glimpse of a past-state of intuition and relativity negates the possibility of expression in metaphors of consumerism. Joe's current selfhood, however, is easily expressed with reference to commodification:

I'm like a brand-new Cadillac in a poor industrial area, insulated by steel and glass and air-conditioning from the people outside, from the rain and the cold and the shivering ailing bodies. I don't wish to be like the people outside, I don't even wish that I had some weakness, some foolishness to immobilize me amongst the envious coolie faces, to let in the rain and the smell of defeat. But I sometimes wish that I wished it. (124)

Traditional gender divisions dictate that femininity can be defined by its passive acceptance of commodification and masculinity by its championing of individual, independent choice. The post-war acceleration in the growth of consumer markets prompted an uncomfortable awareness in some male-authored fiction that the processes of the consumer marketplace are unsettlingly similar to the long-established processes of locating and recognising the masculine self.

David Storey's 1960 novel *This Sporting Life* charts a movement between a working-class community perceived as 'pure' (and poor), to one infiltrated by the priorities and desires of a more affluent consumer society.



Hymned with a tinge of hysteria by Richard Hoggart in his 1957 *The Uses of Literacy*, working-class culture was perceived to be changing from a circulatory space for utilitarian commodities to one of goods the value of which derived primarily from their ascribed prestige. Status symbols were gaining priority over survival methods as their signifying power was repeatedly reinscribed in the burgeoning mass-media. For Hoggart, the admirable depths of duty and purpose of the working classes were silting up with these phoney values:

Most mass-entertainments are in the end what D. H. Lawrence described as 'anti-life'. They are full of a corrupt brightness, of improper appeals and moral evasions. To recall instances: they tend towards a view of the world in which progress is conceived as a seeking of material possessions, equality as a moral levelling, and freedom as the grounds for endless irresponsible pleasure.  
(282)

The appeal to D. H. Lawrence, redolent with a determination to enshrine an essential manhood, is once again instructive here. *This Sporting Life* is rife with anxiety at the perceived dilution of an industrial-strength masculinity with the priorities of a male identity dependent upon the manipulation of signs endowed with significance by effete advertising executives. The novel focuses upon a group of working-class men on the very fault-line of changing social priorities: their lives are split between the harsh reality of employment in mines and factories, and the unreality of a sporting arena of within which conflict is stagy, narcissism is sanctioned, and commodification

of their bodies at its most blatant.

In her essay 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', Gayle Rubin notes: 'Men are of course also trafficked – but as slaves, hustlers, athletic stars, serfs, or as some other catastrophic social status, rather than as men' (176). Such categories are easily contained and dismissed in an analysis focused (justifiably, of course) upon women, but what of life on the inside of that catastrophe, for the 'athletic stars' of the City Rugby League Club at Primstone? Arthur Machin's anxieties at the attendant objectification of his stardom – at being 'an ape' (164) – are liberally voiced in the text. Amidst his triumph at holding out for a £500 signing-on fee are frantic personal calculations of his own body's 'cashworthiness' that extend far beyond the confines of the stadium, as he demands of his landlady:

'Guess how much I'm worth.'

'I don't know. I don't know anything about football.'

'I know you don't. So just guess how much you think I'm *worth*. How much solid cash do you think *I* am?' (68)

Throughout the novel, terms like 'worth' and 'value' are routinely fraught with uncertainty. Reckoning men in impersonal units invokes a familiar horror at the interchangeability of the male body in the hands and minds of the men in power. Arthur says of Weaver and Slomer, the owners of the club:

They were supposed to be the most dangerous people in town – if you could have dangerous people in this town – and Primstone was their mutual toy. They bought and sold players, built them up and dropped them, like a couple of kids with lead soldiers. But that seemed to be the way with any professional sport. (88)

The horror is familiar from the indiscriminate slaughter of war-time, when the soldiers involved were constituted of something even more malleable than lead. It was resurrected in a new strain of social angst: that before the invention of the redemptive concept of consumer choice, the market has the terrifying power to level all its participants to interchangeable consumers. This is at the root of Hoggart's suspicion: conversely to the optimism ascribed to Macmillan's 1957 phrase, the British people had, in reality, never *been had* so good.

'The ho(m)mo-sexual monopoly': the phrase was first coined by Luce Irigaray in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, and developed into a literary paradigm in Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick's *Between Men*. Within a patriarchal society, men act as the exclusive agents of exchange, with women and other goods functioning as conduits for their homosocial desire. It is notable that in Arthur Machin's personal life, the mechanisms for the smooth transferral of women have stalled. He expends enormous effort in attempting to insert himself into the family who own his lodgings, or rather, into the empty space left by Mr Hammond, killed in an industrial accident at Weaver's factory, his body another expendable commodity. Arthur has sex with Mrs Hammond,

he takes her and the kids on Sunday outings, he buys them gifts, but ultimately the patriarch is absent, and Mrs Hammond is unwilling, and unable, to give herself. Kinship has malfunctioned. As Irigaray notes in 'Women on the Market':

All the systems of exchange that organise patriarchal societies and all the modalities of productive work that are recognised, valued and rewarded in these societies are men's business. The production of women, signs and commodities is always referred back to men [...], and they always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to another. (171)

Arthur's impotence amidst these systems of exchange is emphasised repeatedly by his inability to abandon Mrs Hammond's married moniker when he addresses or thinks of her. The traditional patriarchal cash nexus is also disrupted by Arthur's position as a lodger, as it makes the dynamics of market forces within the domestic sphere patently obvious. He says hopelessly to Mrs Hammond after sex: 'You make me feel I'm buying it off you. I'm just buying. And I'm not' (161). As a gift-giver, too, bearer of fur coats and television sets, he voluntarily locates himself within an economy the dynamics of which are noted by David Cheal in *The Gift Economy* to be dictated by 'a feminized ideology of love' (183). Denied the status of patriarch and provider, Arthur confusedly misuses these new-fangled public symbols of status as personal statements of love and intent. The only gift he bestows upon himself, a car, he confidently expects to endow him with the

freedom enshrined in the motorised mobility of the heroes of the pulp fictions he avidly consumes. The Northern road system, however, will have no truck with a British Kerouac:

I thought if only I could break things up like this Stulton [hero of the paperback *Love Tomorrow*], and get on to the next place and leave all these wrecks behind. I even tried driving out of town fast. But the roads were crammed. They twisted and ducked about. And I'd only go a couple of miles, hardly leaving town behind, before I was in the next bloody place. (191)

Elsewhere in Arthur's dealings with women, systems of exchange are also failing: he rejects the advances of the 'sample' Mrs Weaver (107) (the term riddled with the ethos of the travelling salesman) for fear of how sex with her might affect his professional relationship with her husband. Afterwards he regretfully notes of his refusal: 'It's just not an economic proposition. It's so uneconomical that I've to turn down the best thing that ever happened to me. [...] It was so uneconomical that I'd acted like a decent human being' (107). His only glimpse of the dynamics of a 'normal' gender marketplace is through Judith Braithewaite's description of girls on a Saturday night at the Mecca dance-hall: 'It's more or less an auction sale, and they're terrified of going to the wrong bidder' (205).

Why has the ho(m)mo-sexual monopoly broken down in the case of Arthur Machin? In 'Commodities Among Themselves', Irigaray notes that 'there is a price to pay for being the agents of exchange: male subjects have to



give up the possibility of serving as commodities themselves' (193). By virtue of his sports-star status, however, Arthur has had to surrender the possibility of this surrender: as noted above, he is only too aware of his status as commodity. As with all patriarchal social mechanisms, the ho(m)osexual monopoly is founded upon the establishing and containment of the Other. Commodities are necessarily feminized. Crucially in this novel, the feminized commodity is simultaneously a hyper-masculine symbol – the working-class rugby league player. This contradiction strikes at the very heart of a masculine economy so intent upon denying the true direction of its desires. If the commodity is masculine, its acquisition and attendant specularization affords the male purchaser not self-congratulation and increased social standing, but an unavoidable confrontation with the male narcissism that is the concealed crux of the system. Desire between men becomes overt. This rupture leaks out into the novel's manifestations of sensuality, all but one, a lingering over 'the smooth misty curves of the man-cliffs, big and amiable and intimate' (220) at Scarborough, located in the changing rooms at the Club, site of male intimacy, bathing, gazing, and the application of liniment: 'Over on my left Maurice chatted, just his head and lighted cig above the water. Frank, drawing relief from his fag, turned his bull's back to me. I rubbed the soap over his familiar stained skin. I knew it better than my own' (253). The homosexual desire within the novel,



cumulative among scenes like this, is as blatant as contemporary censorship would allow. The basic dynamic of the ho(m)mo-sexual monopoly is exposed.

The novel ends as it began, in the changing room. Life goes doggedly on inside and amidst the bruised bodies, but Arthur Machin's body is older, is depreciating, and the span of his earning potential as a commodity drawing to a close. Earlier, rushing towards the hospital to the bedside of the dying Mrs Hammond, his car breaks down and he has to get out and run. He notes later: 'Perhaps I didn't need a car now. It was getting too old, too knocked about, and I'd never afford another' (248-49). Retirement from the pitch looms, but so too does retirement from his limited attempt competently to consume and to display the symbols of his affluent status. Yet men in general cannot afford to withdraw from their attempt to master the consumer sphere, and there are men, like Joe Lampton, whose economic agency is not compromised by the (catastrophic) object status of the rugby star. The novel affords a brief glimpse of the possibility of progress. Having moved into a flat located, in keeping with his commercial status as necessarily feminized commodity, above a 'small women's department store, just off City Centre' (211), Arthur bumps into Mrs Hammond and her son:

'Hello, Arthur,' the boy said as if I'd seen him every day of his life.  
'There's Arthur, Mam.'

She grunted and pushed by. I followed her a couple of steps.  
'Aren't you going to stop and talk?'

She didn't say anything, and I followed her again. I knew she'd recognized me, knew who and what I was.

'With you in them clothes?' she said. I was in a new lounge suit. Ian put his hand out to touch it and say, 'Suit'. (213)

The next male generation shows a sign that it is learning the language of materialism, and reaches out a hand to feel the fabled quality of a status symbol.

### **The *Male* Text?**

This chapter will conclude with a brief coda, by way of a reiteration of the fact that the narrative techniques and textual practices that I have been tracing in these novels are properly designated as 'masculine' and not male, and thus available to authors of both sexes. Lynne Reid Banks' novel *The L-Shaped Room* (1960) was much lauded on its publication as the debut of an authentic female voice. There are elements of the heroine's subjectivity that can be read as a realistic portrayal of the ways in which a contemporary woman has internalized patriarchal principles of womanly virtue: Jane Graham moves into the dilapidated room out of a sense of guilt at her pregnancy: 'In some obscure way I wanted to punish myself, I wanted to put myself in the setting that seemed proper to my situation' (42). She notes of her forthcoming child:

I wanted a son. This was irrational, since obviously I was more nearly capable of rearing a girl by myself than a boy – I knew almost nothing about little boys except that their need of a father was imperative if they were not to grow into Oedipus-riddled weaklings or even outright homosexuals. (246)

The male characters in the novel that befriend Jane, Toby and John, are coded by their ethnic origins (Jewish and black, respectively), and in John's case too, his homosexuality, as suitably subaltern to also be 'proper' to Jane's degraded situation. More explicit than this, though, are the ways in which the narratorial voice of the novel seeks to flatter men and their assumptions about female behaviour, as in the examples selected below: 'Shaken, we stood at opposite sides of the room, in separate silences. But I couldn't bear to see him standing there so desolately, face to face with his own failure. I knew how it felt, and it must be worse for a man' (215); '*You darling blackbird*, I thought, yearning for him, my treacherous female arms longing to imprison him for ever' (314);

My imagination was working overtime. All the womanish terrors which I had always felt myself to be above, came creeping over me as I lay alone. I thought of everything – prowlers, burglars, murderers, maniacs – even ghosts. I was disgusted with myself, but I couldn't help it. (250)

A familiar binary opposition is being vehemently reinscribed: man = rationality and progression, woman = emotion and regression. Jane's assessment of her Aunt Addy's 'novel of letters' to a lover provides an insight into the way in which this masculine foundational binary is worked

into the narrative technique of *The L-Shaped Room*:

Most of the writer's troubles were self-made, as in real life; they were the self-created hells that a sensitive, emotional woman will always encounter in her everyday dealings with herself and with other people; it was impossible not to believe in them as I read. And I marvelled at the way that explaining them to the recipient of the letters, getting outside them sufficiently to avoid alarming him, yet safe in the knowledge that this was a token act of kindness because he would know quite well how desperately important they seemed to the writer – these factors, together with the vital underlying one that basically nothing mattered too terribly except the fear of losing the one who was loved, made for a sense of balance and light-hearted courage in the face of life which I found so moving and exciting that I kept reading, one letter after another, avid to see how this magic formula would affect the wide range of life-like situations the writer found herself involved in. (242)

The narrative voice of the novel exhibits enough detachment and control to an immasculated reader 'to avoid alarming him', while its occasional emotional expression is explained and excused by being characterised as the product of a feminine, 'womanish' outburst. The heroine herself measures her selfhood with reference to explicitly masculine codes, and the novel's narrative technique again replicates the 'double voice' of superior and rational control and knowing, chummy complicity with a range of attendant values. Aunt Addy insists of the recipient of the letters: 'he doesn't exist [...]. Men like that never do. They always have to be invented' (244). The text of *The L-Shaped Room* uses the narrative techniques of its male-authored peers precisely to reinvent this ideal, immasculated reader.

### Chapter Three: The Consolations of Philosophy

I have tried to show in the course of this book, how the Outsider's one need is to discover how to lend a hand to the forces inside him, to help them in their struggle. And obviously, if he is only vaguely aware of these interior forces, the sensible thing is to become more aware of them and find out what they are aiming at.

Colin Wilson, *The Outsider* (1956)

*'Existentialism is an attempt at philosophizing from the standpoint of the actor instead of, as has been customary, from that of the spectator':* so reads E. L. Allen's attempt to 'hazard a definition of existentialism in a sentence' in his 1953 *Existentialism from Within* (3). Simplistic though this might be, it does prompt an immediate recognition of the potentially radical implications for the influence of existentialism upon the masculine definitions of selfhood and narrative techniques examined in the previous chapter. The existentialist 'authentic' self, encapsulating as it does the concept of an essence continually hard-won by dynamic, individual choice amidst a contingent universe, stands in opposition to a self whose behavioural patterns and values issue from a pre-existent masculine core. Selfhood is won by the constant striving of the individual, not inherited by virtue of solidarity with a group: in fact, existential authenticity is usually apprehended as being inversely proportionate to social conformity. The existential novel should stand in antithesis to the masculine text. The notion of existence as 'being-in-the-world', with its acknowledgement of the subjectivity and instability of each

individual viewpoint, provides a marked contrast to Malcolm Bradbury's lauded 'art of reason' (iii), based upon a supposedly objective record of a supposedly recognisable universal experience. In *Feminism Unmodified*, Catharine MacKinnon claims that 'to look at the world objectively is to objectify it' (50), and that to do so is the quintessential political and epistemological stance under male dominance. The single masculine textual viewpoint, as we have seen, relies upon the valorisation of objectivity and the practice of objectification. The objectification of the Other – subaltern-bashing – should be healthily compromised by the existentialist recognition that your own self exists as a mere object from the point of view of others. The existential hero revels in the isolation of his subjectivity. The recognition of objectification as a false position undermines the device of retrospective narrative as means of gaining control over contingency. A random universe should not be empirically representable in the form of a linear, aetiological narrative. Commitment to an existential philosophy might therefore be expected to effect a radical rethinking of the paradigms of selfhood, gender and narrative traced in Chapter Two. Furthermore, it could herald a break from a male-authored literature riddled with resignation into one which is didactic and dynamic rather than conformist and consolatory.

Allen goes on to note of Jean-Paul Sartre's radical assertion of freedom in *L'Être et le Néant*: 'Thus, in a certain sense, I *choose* to be born':



Whatever criticisms one may be disposed to pass on so startling a conclusion, it has at least one great merit, inasmuch as it challenges the contemporary mood of irresponsibility, the couldn't-care-less attitude. It is clear that this ontology involves an ethic. It is indeed as the effort after a new morality that Sartre's existentialism must be judged. (71)

The existentialist philosophy, in other words, is here hailed as a potential antidote to the perceived moral and political apathy of a stalled liberalism.

In 'The Existentialist Hero', a radio talk broadcast on the BBC Third Programme in March 1950, Iris Murdoch voices her optimism at the philosophy's potential to politicise what she calls the 'cynical frivolity' (109) of the contemporary novel: 'The existentialist shares with the Marxist a feeling of responsibility for the condition of men, a conception of life as perpetual warfare, and a willingness to engage his weapons as a thinker in the battle. Literature, too, must be in the fight, it must be *engagée*' (110).

Empiricism rejects detached theorizing for experience and observation.

Existentialism, Murdoch implies, unites theory with experience and literature with society. In a later essay, 'The Existentialist Political Myth', published in 1952, Murdoch goes so far as to nominate the novelist's aims and strengths as directly convergent with those of the newly-emergent brand of philosopher:

'This is the revolution in philosophic method which is showing us its different faces at the present time. It is a move, one might notice, which brings the activity of the philosopher in some ways closer to that of the

novelist. The novelist is *par excellence* the unprejudiced describer of *le monde vécu*' (131). The existential viewpoint, she claims, free as it is from dogma and bias, can be conflated in its purity with the ideal novelistic viewpoint.

This chapter will not offer an analysis of the existentialist doctrine in its numerous and varied incarnations, or speculate upon its ideological sources. It will instead consider textual evidence from a number of English male-authored novels of the post-Second World War period selected for their engagement with existentialist thought. The novels will be used to gauge the extent to which these narratives' interpretations of existential tenets serve to liberate them from the oppressive and regressive masculine interpretations of gender and self examined in the previous chapter.

## **Outside the Hero**

If the existential creed is that an individual is at large in a contingent universe about which his knowledge is severely limited, his actions redolent with subjective meaning, but the empirical effects of those actions negligible, then the conventions of male literary heroism are under attack. The concept of existential nothingness infers a vacancy for a new type of hero, and those authors averse to the cheerfully compromised popular heroes of the quintessential 1950s English novels were keen to fill it. When his 1957 novel *The Divine and the Decay* was republished as *The Leap* in 1984, Bill Hopkins

used the Author's Preface to the new edition to take issue with the swathes of criticism his novel had received at first publication. A good example of this negative reaction occurs in Kenneth Allsop's examination of the 1950s, *The Angry Decade*:

We seem to be on the edge of a new romantic tradition which is sanctifying the bully as hero. It is exceedingly strange, and profoundly disturbing, if the dissentience (the 'anger') in our present semi-socialised compromise welfare society is going to swing retrogressively to the discredited and hateful system of murder gangs and neurotic mysticism which perished in its own flames. We know that there is political boredom and apathy in Britain, that the drive seems lost and the blood runs thin. Can it be so intolerable that it is creating an ardour for the corrupt vigour of fascism? (186-87)

Hopkins attempts to counter these accusations of political fascism in his novel with an appeal to a mode of artistic experimentation appreciable only by an elite, claiming: 'To be candid, it was written with the idea of offering a seminal work for a few concerned people who appreciated the need to revitalize the novel, or to create a new form altogether' (1), and going on to refer to it as an 'iconoclastic blare of the trumpet' (2). There is a flaw in Hopkins's defence beyond its wording (which, in denying fascist tendencies, manages to evoke both an elitist hierarchy and the military enforcement of that hierarchy, with its trumpet call). *The Divine and the Decay* is very far from exploding the traditional novelistic form – and it is precisely for this reason, I want to argue, that it was repeatedly read as condoning fascism.

The character of Peter Plowart, the novel's protagonist, a ruthless

quester for authenticity, is established to a great extent by his antithesis to Claremont Capothy, daughter of the absent owner of Vachau, an island off Guernsey. Claremont is given the opportunity to deconstruct the masculine literary representation of her gender. She is aware of the conceit of woman as erotic mystery, and equally aware of the incompatibility of this conception with female corporeality. When Plowart breaks into her bedroom one night, she averts his lust by showing him her naked body, explaining: 'You see, while a woman is synonymous with concealment and mystery she's desirable to men. The moment she strips herself the reality is an insult beside the paintings of the imagination. It's the reason men detest wantons; they're too honest to be seductive' (142). However, the text uses Claremont less as an agent of metafictional insight than as a representative of naïve liberal humanism, or, in Plowart's terms, someone 'duped by the world's filthy morality' (230). Confronted with his dramatic and bleak pronouncements, she counters with appeals to basic humanist assumptions, redolent with an enduring horror of the War: 'You can make vileness a virtue so easily! Your kind of thinking can relate eugenics and incinerators and make them part of a perfectly sane argument; isn't that enough to make one suspicious?' (224). This is Allsop's point exactly: that attempts to challenge the populist heroes of what he calls 'our present semi-socialised compromise welfare society' (187) have resulted only in the creation of vile monsters. Hopkins announces

in his preface to *The Leap* that 'I wanted a suspicious, even a hostile reader, with all the aliveness enmity means' (3). Yet the fact that these counter-arguments emanate from a woman, and a woman already revealed in her corporeality, does little to discourage an equation familiar from the masculine text: Plowart = not feminine = heroic. Plowart's judgement of humanism is as a doctrine that fosters sentiment and inauthenticity, an anti-rational, 'feminine' doctrine: Claremont herself notes sagely that 'a woman usually acts in advance of her reasoning' (218).

Hopkins's ideal readers, presumably, would be cynical and superior enough to reject both Plowart's violent extremism and Claremont's conservative stasis for a 'middle-way', yet his novel's realist narrative and gendered sources of symbolism function to ensure instead the identification of an immasculated reader with a traditional masculine exemplar. Rather than allowing that elite interpretive community to infer their own conclusions, the narrative relentlessly positions Plowart as a hero. The third-person narrative is continually focalized through him. The only other character with a substantial role in the novel, Christopher Lumas, is ruthlessly subordinated with reference to his disability (his legs became useless after a fall), his loss of self-control through alcoholism, and his slavish subservience to his cuckolding wife: 'he was mentally, morally, physically and spiritually a ruin of what a man should be' (65). Plowart announces with



confidence that 'in the case of men, the greatest in history were those most dynamic in their actions' (48). The picture gallery of inspirational figures that he establishes in his room contains images of Attila and Hitler. The two other potential alternative selves in the novel, Claremont and Lumas, are dismissed as female and feminized respectively, and Plowart is the only character whose actions might be construed as dynamic. He drives the plot, and his violence (he arranges the murder of co-leader of his political party, the New Britain League) is part of the same dynamic as his admirable striving for self-definition. Just as the immanence of Claremont's corporeality is used to discredit her, so his dynamism manifests itself as that traditional demonstration of male heroism (and Cartesianism) – he can submit his bodily instincts to the majesty of his will, as when he meets Claremont's challenge to go to the end of the White Feather spur:

Looking down he was aware it was for just such ordeals as this that the complicated machinery of his mind had been designed ... just sufficient to drive his body forward where nobody else would go; just harmonious enough to knit his body into an obedient chain of responses; just wilful enough to assume it could be done without the imagination forming pictures of the consequences of a drop. (121)

He has already informed Claremont that: 'even if I fall, I shall not die. Like all great men I've an unconquerable life force, beside which a few rocks are nothing' (121). In the foreword preceding Hopkins's preface to *The Leap*, the author's friend Colin Wilson says of Plowart:



He feels that imagination is not enough; the answer has to lie in action. The saviour requires a saviour. At the end of the book, he has to learn the hardest of all lessons: that he will never solve his problem while he looks to someone else to provide him with the answer. Claremont is lying when she tells him that the rocks will move if he has enough faith; yet the rocks *do* move, and he is saved. (xii)

Plowart triumphs in subjugating his body to his will, and in the novel's final scene, he succeeds in subjugating the power of the ocean currents too, as the rocks appear to move towards him, saving him from the sea. The hero of a *bildungsroman*, he is ultimately educated and triumphant. In his contribution to the 1957 essay collection *Declaration*, Hopkins notes in his 'Ways Without a Precedent':

The heroism of the Twentieth Century Man, as currently postulated, is: (a) in winning a compassionate pair of lips that will lull him to peace after an endless gauntlet of victimizations (thus mysteriously negating the lot), (b) kicking a bullying foreman (an enemy of the people) in a conclusive place, or (c) just inhabiting a dustbin with all the pretences down and stoically waiting for the end. (136-37)

Chapter Two of this thesis has considered options a) and b), and Chapter Four concerns itself with formal experiments like that of c). Plowart's heroism, though, is still within a recognisable tradition, and his final words, 'Indestructible, you fools!' (234) conclude *The Divine and the Decay* on a note of celebration, rather than pathos at his presumption in the face of a contingent universe. Instead of an isolated existential individual, Plowart becomes the representative of a universal principle, a potential example to and dynamic leader of men. 'Ways Without a Precedent' reveals an ulterior

motive behind this professedly radical but effectively conservative hero, as Hopkins claims of the shadowy figure of 'the writer': 'He has conditioned himself to observe everything that happens within his orbit with a steady and remembering eye. As his craft is produced at first-hand, constantly in positions of physical and mental hardship, for him the step towards vision and leadership is not a large one' (148). The nature of this alleged physical hardship constantly endured by this writer is unclear, but Hopkins's intention is obvious: he himself is heir to the heroism his novel reasserts, and that heroism may profess its existentialist aims, but revels in a traditional, hierarchical glory. It is a glory collectively appreciated rather than individually asserted and legitimised.

Accusations of self-glorification as both a writer and a man were frequently levelled at Colin Wilson, self-styled prophet of what he branded a 'religious existentialism'. By 1972, MacQuarrie is claiming forcefully in his *Existentialism* that: 'One cannot [...] link existentialism to Romanticism, except in the sense that they were both opposed to what they took to be a narrow intellectualism. The existentialists have been just as much opposed to aestheticism and sentimentalism as to rationalism' (53). Yet in his 1966 *Introduction to the New Existentialism*, Wilson reveals a similar tendency to Hopkins to conflate existentialism with the tenets of a long-established Romantic literary heroism:

Now the basic impulse behind existentialism is optimistic, very much like the impulse behind all science. Existentialism *is* romanticism, and romanticism is the feeling that man is not the mere creature he has always taken himself for. Romanticism began as a tremendous surge of optimism about the stature of man. (96)

Wilson's earlier philosophical tract, *The Outsider* (1956), an impassioned medley of personal literary preferences, potted biographies and pop-psychological analyses by way of evidence of man's potential for spiritual transcendence, was read as a despicable effort of self-aggrandisement by Kenneth Allsop in *The Angry Decade*. He judged Wilson and his cohorts to be 'propagating their Religious Existentialism which they say requires a higher type of man, a superman, to thrust humanity through to safety out of civilization's big crash. It is probably unnecessary to add that they see themselves as the super-men, the law-givers' (22). 'Religious Existentialism', like 'existentialism *is* romanticism': Wilson is unperturbed by the conflation of terms. For him God does exist, because a man can make himself godlike, and existentialism, as a code for achieving this individual transcendence, *is* a religion. Fashioned in this way, existentialism becomes a means of achieving spiritual security rather than radical uncertainty, and also a way of establishing a new social hierarchy, with super-men (and emphatically *not* super-women) at the head. Wilson notes in 'Beyond the Outsider' that: 'All the great religions were founded by one man, a law-giver: Mahomet, Moses, Zoroaster, Christ, Gautama. That is

most important' (45). No contradiction is seen between existentialist aims of individual liberation, and the reassertion of a patriarchal and essentialist social structure. The ultimate goal, as laid out in *The Outsider*, is 'the ultimate restoration of order' (15). Wilson's alleged existentialism involves no Nietzschean disavowal of the doer behind the deed, but rather a race of super-men whose actions are guaranteed authentic by the pre-existing authenticity of their gender, their essence and their intellect. As Jeffner Allen has noted, this kind of 'existential hero intercepts the decline of the rule of essence' (75). Wilson's existential acts are not random, but emanate from a pre-existing central core – a masculine self.

This congenital masculinity is reinforced in Wilson's treatment of sexual relationships. In the groundbreaking essay in feminist film studies, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', published in *Screen* in 1975, Laura Mulvey claims of the voyeurism of the male cinematic gaze that its 'sadistic side fits in well with narrative. Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end' (22). Colin Wilson's own fictional works would seem to offer perverse early evidence of this connection between male sadism and narrative. *Ritual in the Dark* centres upon its protagonist Gerard Sorme's fascination with Austin Nunne, who is gradually revealed to be the prolific

'Whitechapel Killer', engaged in murdering prostitutes with increasing violence. Sorme, though repulsed to some extent by Nunne's 'combination of coarseness and femininity' (21) – Nunne is homosexual – is determined for the majority of the novel to interpret his crimes as an admirable reaction to the stasis of contemporary society, and his sadism as a vital aspect of male sexual desire. Nunne explains to Gerard:

The whole point of sadism... is that it wants to take what someone doesn't want to give. If they want to give it, it's not the same.

But I *do* understand, Sorme contradicted him. I feel the same frequently. Nothing shatters me more than a woman who wants to be made love to. (129)

This points to the philosophical thesis of the novel: modern life has lost its intensity, and there is a possibility for a man to regain that intensity through (heterosexual) sex, but the act must retain its traditional balance of power, with the woman passive and unwilling, and the man active and triumphant. Sorme's two sexual conquests in the novel, Gertrude and her younger niece, Caroline, are both virgins, and the penetration of Caroline is immediately followed by this effusive burst of Nietzschean yea-saying at the discovery of a means of experiencing the intensity of existence that does not involve murder:

What was happening now was realer than any of his thoughts about sex, more real than anything except pain: it was an intimation of the reason behind the tireless continuity of life. He felt astonished at his own stupidity for not realising it before. He wanted to make a vow: to accept always, only accept, accept anything, embrace everything with



the certainty that all things would yield like this, an engulfing pleasure. (240)

God may be dead, but as John MacInnes argues, 'the fetishism of religion (whereby people projected their existential anxiety onto god and dealt with it through their imagined relationship to Him)' (13) may be replaced with the fetishism of sex. (Hetero-) Sex plays a similarly crucial philosophical (and religious) role in Wilson's *Man Without a Shadow: The Diary of an Existentialist*. In it, the returning Gerard Sorme explicitly conflates the sexual impulse with an existential impulse toward authenticity: 'I watch my sexual impulse at work with a kind of amazement. I may not know why I'm alive, but something inside me does. Sex is the only power I know that can defeat the awful pressure of the present' (35). However, this is far from a project to incorporate sexuality into the masculine definition of selfhood. Sex is portrayed here as an intensifier of consciousness, a philosophical tool, but one that requires to be wielded by a man, and in the presence of feminine surrender (Gerard has not lost his taste for virgins). Volition in heterosexual intercourse and existential insight are conflated, then ruthlessly policed to exclude the feminine: 'The male confronts his boredom with a need to conquer, to penetrate, to achieve ecstasy by a kind of aggression. The female reacts to freedom with the cry: come and penetrate me. Bring me ecstasy and sensation' (119). The novel upholds orgasm as the model for the apotheosis



of human consciousness, but it is the male orgasm, itself a linear narrative, a drive to 'conquer' and 'achieve'.

Wilson's work preserves the sanctity of the heroic masculine narrative, and the climax of that narrative becomes a matter of the education of a paradoxically already-complete selfhood. Just such an assumption is replicated in the later work of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in his 1981 *After Virtue*. His argument is made in opposition to that continental existential set-text, Sartre's *Nausea*, in which Roquentin asserts that to present a life as a narrative is to falsify the true lived experience, which is one of fragmentation, alienation and dislocation. MacIntyre's chief concern is to present identity as inextricable from community, but he also makes the assertion that: 'The difference between imaginary characters and real ones is not in the narrative form of what they do; it is in the degree of their authorship of that form and of their own deeds' (200). Authentic identity is a matter of the control of deeds and events by an authoritative pre-existing self. Similarly, in *The Outsider*, itself ostensibly a narrative of self-improvement, Wilson makes the point that:

The *Bildungsroman* sets out to describe the evolution of the 'hero's soul'; it is fictional biography that is mainly concerned with its hero's reaction to ideas, or the development of his ideas about 'life' from his experience. The *Bildungsroman* is a sort of laboratory in which the hero conducts an experiment in living. For this reason, it is a particularly useful medium for writers whose main concern is a philosophical answer to the practical question: What shall we do with

our lives? Moreover, it is an interesting observation that as soon as a writer is seized with the need to treat a problem he feels seriously about in a novel, the novel automatically becomes a sort of *Bildungsroman*. The *Bildungsroman* is the natural form of serious fictional art. (51-52)

This is a tour-de-force for a masculine literary agenda: not only is authentic existence equated with the narrative of the heroic male quest, but this style of narrative is established as the über-form of all literary endeavour, its (male) writers heroes too. Steven Connor notes the frequency with which it is assumed that:

The representative form of the novel is the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of education and development. Such a novel offers the promise of a reciprocal mirroring between the individual and society; in the *Bildungsroman*, society becomes visible as the enabling field of operations for the individual, and the individual as the actualisation of social possibility. (6)

The novel of education in its most common form, a retrospective narrative focused upon a single male protagonist, functions to reinscribe the patriarchal social structure as an arena of personal liberation and fulfilment. Patriarchy is simultaneously normalized and glamorized.

In his introduction to *Man Without a Shadow*, Wilson discusses the problems of producing 'a novel of ideas'. He notes: 'I approached this problem in *Ritual in the Dark*, to which this present novel is a sequel. There I failed, and contented myself with a compromise – a novel that "told a story", and got in the ideas wherever it could, provided they never held up the

action' (14). *Man Without a Shadow*, he claims, 'cannot be called a novel' (14), but is rather an attempt at 'an existential realism. Like social realism, its attitude to reality is not passive or pessimistic. In a qualified sense, it might be called practical; it wishes to change things. What it wishes to change I prefer to leave unstated; it can be inferred from this book' (15-16). *Man Without a Shadow* purports to avoid the perceived philosophical compromise of *Ritual in the Dark* by resorting to a diary form, which touts itself as more realistic:

It may seem that in writing like this I am only indulging in a kind of intellectual onanism; but this would be to miss the point. *There is a point*. I keep trying to break into reality with this crowbar of reason. I don't try a 'systematic' attack, like a philosopher or a theologian; I don't want to 'explain' the world, like Thomas Aquinas. I want to keep *jabbing*, in the hope that the point of my crowbar will find a crack in the stones and be able to lever them apart. In a way, this diary is the ideal way to try and do it. My method of attack is the same as that of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Wells; fragmentary. Yet this is necessary. (69)

Wilson denies a charge of onanism (once again, with this metaphor, the intellectual is conflated with the sexual) with a sustained description of striving for penetration, a situation he has previously established as both revelatory and exclusively male. The traditional (and feminine) connotations of the diary form – secrecy, domesticity, emotion etc – are sidestepped with the concept of 'inductive existentialism': 'All my work is existential in the sense that it badly wants to stick to living experience; but it's inductive

because it wants to reason from the *particular* to the general' (25). For all the allegiance sworn to existential thought, Wilson's aesthetic philosophy has come full circle – back to Bradbury's desire for 'the novel in its empirical form' (iii). Claims for the universality of the masculine, it seems, are inextricably linked to narrative in its realist, contiguous form. In *Introduction to the New Existentialism*, Wilson, rejecting what he identifies as the '*cul de sac*' of pessimism that is part of 'traditional' existentialism, announces:

My purpose is to outline a new form of existentialism that avoids this *cul de sac*, and that can continue to develop. It rejects Sartre's notion of man's contingency – for reasons which I shall discuss in detail. Its bias is therefore distinctly optimistic, and its atmosphere is as different from that of the 'old existentialism' as the atmosphere of G. K. Chesterton's novels differ from *Waiting for Godot*. Its methods might be described as Anglo-Saxon and empirical rather than as 'continental' and metaphysical. (18)

### **A Masculine Philosophy?**

The novels examined so far in this analysis have been read as demonstrative of a compromise of the implications of existentialist doctrine in order ultimately to allow a more traditional definition of selfhood, and one compliant with patriarchal priorities. The masculine self is an essentialist one, its gender identity a given rather than a performance, and its actions an imposition of that self onto the world, not a means of achieving its essence. The epistemological and social structure disseminating from this ideal self is

one of purportedly 'natural' male superiority. Yet could it be the case that, rather than being a compromise of existentialism, this reinforcement of masculine conceptions of self and society is intrinsic to the philosophy itself? Perhaps the quintessential existential fictional text, Albert Camus's *The Outsider*, ends thus:

As if this great outburst of anger had purged all my ills, killed all my hopes, I looked up at the mass of signs and stars in the night sky and laid myself open for the first time to the benign indifference of the world. And finding it so much like myself, in fact so *fraternal*, I realized that I'd been happy, and that I was still happy. (117, my emphasis)

Contingency here has become a source of comfort, and this comfort stems from self-identification with a random universe, and a resulting 'fraternal' kinship; reality, and revelation, are coded as male. In her *SCUM Manifesto*, Valerie Solanas propounded just this case with characteristic verve and viciousness, albeit with a different motive:

Most men, utterly cowardly, project their inherent weaknesses onto women, label them female weaknesses and believe themselves to have female strengths; most philosophers, not quite so cowardly, face the fact that male lacks exist in men, but still can't face the fact that they exist in men only. So they label the male condition the Human Condition, pose their nothingness problem, which horrifies them, as a philosophical dilemma, thereby giving stature to their animalism, grandiloquently label their nothingness their 'Identity Problem', and proceed to prattle on pompously about the 'Crisis of the Individual', the 'Essence of Being', 'Existence preceding Essence', 'Existential Modes of Being', etc., etc. (18-19)

Existentialism, she claims, is a compensatory ideology for inherent, and abhorrent, male characteristics. In the essay 'An Introduction to Patriarchal Existentialism', Jeffner Allen too is uncompromising in her judgment of the philosophy: 'Existentialism is, in principle, patriarchal existentialism' (78). The philosophy, in other words, is the product not of intrinsic male mania (as it is for Solanas), but rather of a society organised under the auspices of male superiority. Judith Butler extends the critique of existentialism from the level of the social to the epistemological. In her analysis of the philosophical work of Simone de Beauvoir in *Gender Trouble*, she sees Beauvoir's feminist aims as antithetical to those of existentialism, suggesting that the doctrine does not need to be misread in order to be appropriated by masculine priorities; rather, it inherently rehearses and enforces these priorities. Beauvoir's project of existential feminism – to reinscribe gender as a developing engagement with situations, structures and responsibilities – is, according to Butler, doomed to failure due to a fundamental clash between feminism and existentialism. In contrast to Irigaray's thesis of the feminine self as a point of linguistic absence, outside all established epistemological systems, Beauvoir's interpretation of the female sex is that it exists within signification as a *marked* concept, while the male sex remains unmarked. It is precisely this 'purity' of the male sex, however, that assures its positioning as universal:



For Beauvoir, the 'subject' within the existential analytic of misogyny is always already masculine, conflated with the universal, differentiating itself from a feminine 'Other' outside the universalizing norms of personhood, hopelessly 'particular', embodied, condemned to immanence. Although Beauvoir is often understood to be calling for the right of women, in effect, to become existential subjects and, hence, for inclusion within the terms of an abstract universality, her position also implies a fundamental critique of the very disembodiment of the abstract masculine epistemological subject. (11)

Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex* that a woman's body has come to be interpreted as her essence, but should become instead a site of freedom rather than imprisonment. Butler takes issue with this assumption, arguing that it merely perpetuates the radical (and masculine) ontological distinction of mind and body (and man and woman) passed through the patriarchy from Plato to Descartes to Husserl to Sartre. Beauvoir's feminist ambitions are thus conceived to be a betrayal of the post-structuralist feminist aim precisely to defuse and abandon such binary hierarchies.

During the 1970s, as the Anglo-American Woman's Movement developed, Sartre was much criticised by feminists for the 'sexism' of the imagery employed in his philosophical texts (the standard piece being Margery Collins and Christine Pierce's 1973 article 'Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre's Psychoanalysis'). This accusation of Sartre followed an earlier and similar charge against William Barrett for his popular book *Irrational Man* (1962), in which Barrett claimed that Sartre's psychology of Being-in-Itself (*en-soi*) and Being-For-Itself (*pour-soi*) was implicitly aligned with established

gender roles; that is, femininity as immanence and masculinity as volition.

The debates surrounding existentialism that we have considered, then, have placed it in the dock under three distinct charges related to gender: it is a male philosophy, a patriarchal philosophy, or a philosophy riddled with the misogynist assumptions of a pervading masculine epistemology. In this context, we will interrupt our examination of male-authored fictional selves to consider Iris Murdoch's 1954 novel *Under the Net*, to assess how her novel's engagement with existentialism negotiates the philosophy's association with these various misogynist systems of value. *Under the Net* plays explicitly with two recognisable contemporary heroes, the 1950s Welfare State male of Chapter Two, with his hapless love affairs, mistrust of money and class, and a well-meaning job in a hospital, and the timeless, lone, existential hero. The confrontation of these two tropes is manifested in the relationship between Jake and Hugo, but also within the character of Jake himself, whose narration displays characteristics of both: 'A strange light, cast back over our friendship, brought new things into relief, and I tried in an instant to grasp the whole essence of my need of her. I took a deep breath, however, and followed my rule of never speaking frankly to women in moments of emotion' (12). Jake's statement jokily juxtaposes a philosophical quest for the truth about his relationship with Madge and a knowing, clubby, witticism.

These two modes of heroism are used to defuse and undermine each other, pointing up the practical inadequacy of both. Hugo combines an empiricist's respect for situational particularity with Wittgenstein's scepticism over the ability of language to capture the truth of existence. Yet crucially, his ideas are only available to us through Jake's representation of them in his published tract *The Silencer* (in which Hugo appears as 'Annandine'). (The publication of Jake Donaghue's pseudo-existential tome, extracted in *Under the Net*, actually preceded *The Outsider* by two years.) In *The Silencer*, Annandine proclaims: 'It is in silence that the human spirit touches the divine' (81). (His name provides a tantalizing echo of 'anodyne': are such sphinx-like proclamations thereby mocked for being soothing but noncommittal?) Hugo ends the novel by embracing contingency to the point that he abandons all his wealth to become a watchmaker in Nottingham, the nonentity of his chosen location terrifying to a narrator who considers those parts of London that are west of Earls Court to be the essence of nothingness: 'There are some parts of London which are necessary and others which are contingent. Everywhere west of Earls Court is contingent, except for a few places along the river. I hate contingency. I want everything in my life to have a sufficient reason' (24). Horology is a worthy occupation, but, though the precision it requires might be admirably empirical, it is not the aspirational stuff of 1950s novels. As a writer, Jake himself cannot abandon

the possibility of an engaged negotiation of existence communicable in literature. By the end of *Under The Net* he has rejected the translation of novels for writing his own and recognised his need to respect the authenticity of the selves of others such as his friend Finn. After Jake's repeated and flippant assertions that Finn would never return to Dublin, Finn has returned to Dublin: 'I felt ashamed, ashamed of being parted from Finn, of having known so little about Finn, of having conceived things as I pleased and not as they were' (247). Jake comes to a practical personal and political compromise: he will work part-time in a hospital (as in *Hurry on Down*, the venue serves as microcosm of the new reality), and write part-time, combining direct social engagement with indirect (but still engaged) literary production. This 'middle way' between the individualist and community-minded literary male heroes evidently emphasizes the inadequacy of both figures without their compromise.

Why, though, does Murdoch's hero need to be male? A number of possible reasons spring to mind. One reinforces the case of those who claim existentialism to be inherently misogynist: a novel about an epistemological quest needs a male hero in order to be recognisable as such, as women, mired in their immanence, do not traditionally ask the universe for meaning. Would the philosophical musings of Jake or Hugo be received less seriously by a conditioned contemporary audience if they came from the mouth of a

woman? In his examination of her work, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and The Artist*, Peter Conradi notes of the novel: 'It is the first and least disquieting of her brilliant first-person male narrations. She has called her identification with the male voice "instinctive"; I know nothing quite like them. There are male novelists who can persuade you into the minds of young women [...]; the reverse feat seems rarer' (28). The same process of conflation is at work both in Murdoch's claim that her attraction to the male narrative is instinctive, and Conradi's that this instinct is both exceptional and laudable – that of masculinity with volition and philosophical clout. Philosophy, Conradi implies, as a rational business, requires the male instinct to run it; hence his determination here to make Murdoch mentally male. *Under the Net* never resorts to the petty machinations of subaltern-bashing apparent in, say, *Scenes from Provincial Life*, but its exclusion of the female characters from its philosophical discussions and conclusions does seem a valid topic for consideration due to the gender of its author/philosopher. The Parisian episode in which Jake loses Anna in the Tuileries gardens at night, and is then confronted by a similarly-dressed woman seeking a lover amongst the trees (192-96), might initially be interpreted to function as a metaphor for essential feminine mystery. However, on the removal of the comforts of Finn from Jake as punishment for his stubborn misreading of his friend, it becomes apparent that the park scene symbolizes the otherness of Anna for

the man who claims to love her utterly. Is it possible then, that Murdoch's motivation for choosing a male protagonist, if in part 'instinctual', might be predominantly deflationary, allowing a critique of contemporary literary male heroism, in both its tropes as posturing existential adolescent and quietist adult conformist? If so, it is unclear why the novel conforms so closely to traditional patterns of masculine realist narrative, with an omniscient, retrospective narrator who is apparently unable to apply the self-irony he has allegedly discovered before the point of telling his story. Frustratingly, rather than ridiculing Conradi's misogynist assertions, the narrative form of *Under The Net* perpetuates the implicit gendering of philosophy as a masculine pursuit.

### **Choosing to be Born**

Vinson, a character in Nigel Dennis' 1955 novel *Cards of Identity*, attempts a definition of the post-war English self in terms too Sartrean to be merely coincidental: 'The nearest I can get to defining the new identity is to say that the one I lacked previously is now lacking on a much higher level. It's as if with a single leap I had mounted a full flight closer to the Realization of Nothingness' (167). The novel provides numerous case-studies of inauthentic human existence. Initially, the basic supposition seems to be anti-existentialist: that human identity issues from an individual's past. That past,



however, is then shown to be infinitely alterable, thus removing the possibility of a contiguous selfhood. In her book *An Eye for an 'I': Attrition of the Self in the Existential Novel*, Roseline Intrater notes how 'Dennis uses this indeterminacy much as Sartre does, as a construct of Nothingness, as if it were an amniotic fluidity from which all identities emerge and to which they periodically return' (111). *Cards of Identity* is conspicuous in its existential mistrust of rigid theoretical reasoning ruthlessly applied to this fluidity of individual human experience. The members of the Identity Club, gathered together for their annual conference, range from a Freudian psychiatrist to a dialectical materialist to a cleric, but they are united across their many disciplines by their interest in documenting their imposition of new identities upon unwitting members of the public. The intellectual unity of this common interest, however, is acknowledged by their own president to be as contingent as all other identities. He, it is noted, has 'even given the impression that all theories are pretty much alike as far as he is concerned, and that the Theory of Identity is not only not the only true theory but merely one of the many plausible ideas which are floating about nowadays' (288).

In its stipulation of theoretical reasoning as just another interchangeable system, Dennis's novel demonstrates affiliation with the texts of Chapter Two. The antidote to effete Mandarin intellectualism in, say,

*Lucky Jim*, was an empirical demonstration of selfhood – a fist and a heart-felt insult into the face of Bertrand Welch. Existential authenticity involves the exercise of choice rather than muscle. Vinson, a case-study in Dr Bitterling's conference paper 'The Case of the Co-Warden of the Badgeries', initiates a new identity for himself:

As I watched, Vinson suddenly stiffened his limbs and groaned; his eyes rolled upwards and he began to twitch with convulsive shudders. I said gently, but with excitement: 'Vinson! Are you being reborn?'

He nodded tersely, reluctant to be distracted, and reached his hands backwards as if grasping a pair of bed-posts. A few seconds later he again groaned, shuddered, slapped himself sharply on the buttocks and let out a high wail. Then, all at once, he became himself again, and lit a Craven A. (166)

Vinson is sovereign of his own birth, he *chooses* to be born, and here combines the roles of a mother in the throes of labour, a screaming baby, a slapping midwife and a smoking father – a man creating, delivering and celebrating himself. In the essay 'An Introduction to Patriarchal Existentialism', Jeffner Allen, referring to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, claims:

The existentialist voices the belief that birthing is 'sick' and 'unclean', and comes himself miraculously into existence, seemingly without nurturance of any kind. Just as God created the world *ex nihilo*, the existentialist attempts to create himself out of nothing. By separating himself from 'the given', the existential hero is omnipotently what he makes himself. (76)

This male usurpation of human creation is a key gambit in the context within which the novel was produced. Ten years after the end of conflict, the

Second World War could now unhesitatingly be nominated as some sort of fracture in the progression of Western character and history. The conflict being for the most part created by and destructive of (military) men, reactions to it might be expected to be qualified by gender. The narrator of Dr Bitterling's paper provides a vivid picture of what he considers to be a 'natural' progression of male identity: 'There is the father, still leaning backwards towards the world of *his* father, and beside him a son following exactly the same bent. They are thus together recreating the identity of the young man's grandfather and binding the vague present to an identifiable past' (170). The war has made absent an entire generation of supplicant sons and potential fathers and grandfathers, compromising the possibility of an inherited patriarchal identity and demanding a new, instantaneous means of male reproduction. Despite its existential ambitions, as we will see, solace for this disruption is found in the novel in a familiar concept – congenital gender identities.

Existential awareness in the novel is not only gender-specific, but distinguished by a specific nationality too. The instability of identity is diagnosed as symptomatic of a particular time in a particular place. In the paper he presents to the Identity Club, Dr Shubunkin remarks of the British post-war nation that 'we are in what is always called a transitional period – and nothing disgusts me more than the transitional' (221). The loss of a

stable national and personal identity in the novels is directly linked to the decline of the class system and its hierarchical structure of reference. By 1972, John MacQuarrie is categorising existentialism as inherently antithetical to Britishness:

The existentialist style of thought seems to emerge whenever man finds his securities threatened, when he becomes aware of the ambiguities of the world and knows his pilgrim status in it. This also helps to explain why existentialism has flourished in those lands where the social structures have been turned upside down and all the values transvalued, whereas relatively stable countries (including the Anglo-Saxon lands) have not experienced this poignancy and so have not developed the philosophizing that flows from it. (60)

In *Cards of Identity*, however, the continental metaphysical vertigo resulting from occupation and total devastation are equated with and subsumed by English uncertainties arising from a destabilisation of the class system. The Club meet in a dilapidated country pile, of which it is remarked:

This sort of house was once a heart and centre of the national identity. A whole world lived in relation to it. Millions knew who they were by reference to it. Hundreds of thousands look back to it, and not only grieve for its passing but still depend on it, non-existent though it is, to tell them who they are. Thousands who never knew it are taught every day to cherish its memory and to believe that without it no man will be able to tell his whereabouts again. It hangs on men's necks like a millstone of memory; carrying it, and looking back on its associations, they stumble indignantly backwards into the future, confident that man's self-knowledge is gone forever. (119)

This epitaph is, of course, in part parodic of a literature and a way of life no longer possible in the modern state. As Robert Hewison claims in *In Anger*:

Mandarin values can be seen most clearly in relation to the values of a secure social order represented by the English country house, a regular setting for plays and novels, of which *Brideshead Revisited* [...] is the most significant. Yet the celebration of the country house was more an attempt to retrieve the shreds of the institution's former glories, than to use its values as a source of imagination or inspiration. (xiii)

Similarly, *Cards of Identity*, for all its aspirations towards mockery, is riddled with a sense of loss rather than liberation in reaction to the allegedly classless society. The paper 'The Case of the Co-Warden of the Badgeries' provides a vivid, and comic, demonstration in its parody of English ceremonial ritual:

The stuffed, or token, boar-badger is inserted into a symbolic den and then eased out with your official emblem, a symbolical gold spade. In this way, there is no need actually to disturb any living badger: the whole ceremony is performed quietly in London. [...] Once you start letting your symbolic acts overlap, each tends to deny the significance of the other. That's what's wrong with the Health Service, of course. One minute people think they're getting it free, the next that it is an intolerable burden. They don't know if they're giving or receiving. (152)

The criticism here is aimed at symbolism *per se*, though there is a lingering sense of nostalgia for the pomp of former circumstances. In a 1959 article entitled 'Class and Conflict in British Foreign Policy' in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, Peregrine Worsthorne remarked how 'everything about the British class system begins to look foolish and tacky when related to a second class power on the decline' (quoted Cannadine, 159). Badgers and golden spades are obviously, and deliberately, tacky, but they are still preferable to the mundane muddle of the new symbolism. This replaces the country house



with the urban hospital as preferred national microcosm, but it is unclear as to whether that Health Service is celebratory of individual responsibility for the collective, or collective support of each individual.

Dennis's interpretation of existential thought is becoming clearer, and it refutes the philosophy's most basic tenets. The nostalgia that pervades the novel cannot be attributed to an existential recognition of the eternal nothingness surrounding the self and a regretful longing for the blissful ignorance before the realisation. Rather it stems from the recognition of the loss of a once unquestionably stable selfhood and 'natural' social order. In other words, existential angst is not the enlightened recognition of the reality of the human condition, but inspired by contemporary, and potentially temporary, circumstances. The compromise of selfhood is marked as the affliction of a particular generation – the young adults of a 'classless' society – and a particular gender. It is explicitly linked not to the male experience of war itself, but to the implications of the War for the male post-war population. In post-war Britain, by necessity, women were evident in the public sphere: they had power in the work-place and ambitions of their own. A good part of the novel's horror lies in the perceived emasculation of the Englishman: 'The pallor of the young post-war husbands, out to furnish the hard-won cottage or flat, was in no way as terrifying as the cold-steel ferocity in the faces of their wives' (144). The stable, pre-war self that has been lost is



an essentialist, masculine self. A monstrous reversal of gender roles is portrayed as having taken place: men are pale and disorientated, women crazed by their new-found power. Freudian psychology and its reckless talk of the fluidity of sexuality have only increased the gender confusion. Dr Shubunkin claims that 'there is no such thing as pure male or pure female. Some wear skirts and some wear pants, but this is only convention. Every man is stuffed with womanly characteristics, every woman is fraught with man. The gap between the powder-puff and the cavalry moustache appears wide but is really a hair's-breadth' (206). The phantasmagoric descriptions that accompany Dr Shubunkin's assertions, of Violet the gigantic lesbian balancing policemen atop oaken tables on her broad back, leave the reader with no option other than to treat his conclusions with irony.

It has become evident that this is not an existentialist mocking of over-intellectualized theory, but rather the use of an ironically-exaggerated Freudian psychology in order to mock the exaggerated tenets of existential thought. Shubunkin is ridiculous because he does not appreciate the 'natural' essence of personal and gender identities: Sartre *et al* are ridiculous for precisely the same reason. If existence precedes essence, the essential male self cannot exist, yet for the nation to survive, it *must* exist, and it must be reasserted. This is a transitional period of national identity, but a means of ending the transition is proffered, and it is not the morality forged amidst

the actions of each individual, but a reassertion of a traditional morality in which men are the holders of power. If the self is inherently masculine, and masculinity is under threat, then that threat will be interpreted as a threat to selfhood, as it is here. If nationality is also conceived of as masculine, the nation too is in danger. Similarly, if received conceptions of selfhood are threatened, as existentialism seeks to do, that threat will be interpreted as a threat to masculinity. Just as it was in the Burgess and MacLean affair of 1951, stable masculinity has been conflated with a state of both national and ontological security. In the preface of *Two Plays and a Preface*, which contains a theatrical version of *Cards of Identity*, Dennis levels the following criticism at both T.S. Eliot and Jean-Paul Sartre:

The theoretician decides that existence consists in action, from which he concludes that any sort of action confers existence and any sort of inaction abolishes it. And that is all. Those who are to be the victims of the evil actions are not consulted: they belong to the world outside the library and are therefore excluded from its considerations. (49)

Existentialist action is firmly rejected as being anti-community, anti-social.

Sartre and the philosophy that he was instrumental in shaping is branded

Mandarin. Existentialism and socialism are notoriously uneasy bed-fellows:

Murdoch makes the claim in 'The Existentialist Political Myth' that Sartre's

'more Fabian *persona*' (139) is forced into feigning the conclusion that social

equality is deducible from existentialism, when in fact, she adjudges, it

necessitates the assumption of a pre-existent human nature: humanity as

absolute. For Sartre, and his ideological ingénues of the Sixties, an emphasis upon individual freedom self-evidently required attendant political freedoms to allow its development. When, like Dennis, your concealed political agendum involves the reassertion of a patriarchal social hierarchy, the assumption of a pre-existent human identity is necessary, and that identity must be gendered. His reluctance to entertain the notion of existence preceding essence might be attributed to the fact that such a gambit removes the possibility of a guaranteed patriarchal dividend: a male individual forging his essence alone loses his right to traditional masculine social superiority. The essential self is once again upheld as paradigmatic, and as masculine. The masculine gender, and identity itself, is ultimately defined as innate rather than dynamic and performative.

Two decades on, Andrew Sinclair's 1967 *Gog* ends with a determined confirmation of existential independence and of being-with-others as its hero returns home to London:

A man is a man is a man. He has only his body to inhabit. He fights for himself, not the people. He struggles for his own. He has no other. He is his champion. He battles for his cause. He does not want Liberty, but to be free. He does not want Equality, but to say sir to no one. He does not want Fraternity, but to have some brothers. A man's ribs are his own castle. There he dwells until he dies. As he can love his own person, so may he love each person and all persons.

In these words, Gog finds out a new conscience on the way to Hampstead. (485)

With this tolling insistence upon male-gendered nouns and pronouns, the novel concludes that an existentialist awareness is exclusively male. This insight has been developed over the course of George Griffin (Gog)'s picaresque adventures, but the seed of them was planted in the battlefield of the Second World War, where the only certainty was the necessity of male self-reliance. Gog says of his wife Maire: 'She doesn't know what war does. You learn to depend on yourself. There's no one else sometimes. You can do without women. They become irrelevant. Except to buy when you pass through a city' (231). War has widened the gap in understanding between the sexes, leaving men full of guilt and women full of hatred. Distressed by the revelation of a possible son in her husband's past, Maire, implying a radical feminist stance contemporaneous with the novel's publication date rather than its immediate post-war setting, sobs, 'Beast,' [...] 'Man' (414). Gog confesses to the self-styled 'Pardoner' he meets on the road:

'The trouble is, I don't really know what the actual sin is. I've done many bad things, even on the road, but I don't feel guilty about them. I'm feeling guilty about everything, I suppose. About being a man.'

'That's a very guilty thing to be,' the Pardoner agrees, biting the bony knuckle of his thumb. 'But you're a rare and honest man, pardon me saying so, sir. There's not many as admit how guilty they are, these days of war. There's too much to be guilty for, I suppose.' (348)

Gog's admission could be one of genuine guilt at male implication in a war based upon principles of rationalized genocide. Its petulant tone, however,

suggests instead that his confession of malaise is intended only to initiate an ameliorative reaction from the Pardoner, who, true to his job-description (and a reputation for corruptibility lingering from Chaucerian times), responds immediately and sympathetically. The text is toying with contemporary feminist sensibilities, although male guilt is confessed less flippantly and more explicitly later in the novel. At this meeting with the Pardoner, guilt is not inspired by personal responsibility, but forced by social imposition. Re-entry into a society of mannered mores after the radical contingency of conflict proves difficult for Gog, prompting an effort towards an authentic selfhood forged amidst repeated self-assertion:

‘Really,’ Gog says, ‘I suppose all our sins come out of our obsessions. It’s just easier to do one’s worst in war. I probably got used to doing all the horrible things I wanted to do, fighting. Then I came home, and I don’t know how to behave here. I’m looking for my true self so hard these days, I seem ready to do anything which my inner nature tells me to do, without question. (348-49)

Post-war Britain is ill-equipped as a venue for instinctive male self-assertion. Gog is cast up on the west coast of Scotland, presumably from a navy vessel, and then precedes to tour the length of ‘Albion’ before reaching the nation’s capital. Albion is painstakingly designated as a special temperamental and ontological case. Gog’s alter-ego/brother, Magog, is used in the novel as a symbol of technocratic capitalism, antithetical to freedom:

O, Magog, Magog, how clever you are, when you make nearly all people believe that freedom is anti-social, solitude is misanthropic,

refusal is hating, pride is improper, and passion certifiable. Yet one thing you cannot take from the people, for they take it from the example of the island. You cannot call each man's lonely suffering a mere form of masochism, when the whole body of Albion is only an island suffering alone in the north sea, when a national pride in being each a good loser makes the nation usually win by each losing so often and indifferently that the winners give up and go down before such a callous virtue of lasting. (361-62)

While harbouring a suspicion of freedom inculcated by advanced capitalism, the British, the narrator here suggests, retain a 'natural' isolation imposed by their geographical location. Contemporary Albion is engaged in dogged self-sacrifice rather than dogged self-assertion, yet its citizens' native determination is still salvageable. Gog attempts to establish individual freedom as a community service, and authenticity of self as the pre-requisite of being-with-others. At the novel's conclusion, as we have seen, Sinclair, like Dennis, defies the characterisation of existentialism as necessarily continental: Gog rejects Liberty, Equality and Fraternity<sup>1</sup> for the experience of freedom, autonomy and brotherhood. Obstinate British isolation, it is suggested, is potentially more authentically existentialist than French state-enforced idealism. The philosophy of individual dynamism is claimed for Albion, paradoxically by an argument rooted in geographical essentialism.

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note how Camus' s use of the word 'fraternal' in the conclusion of *The Outsider* has strong nationalistic implications, as well as gendered ones.



Albion, however, is not yet worthy of stability, and the transitional nature of the nation's situation is communicated through Gog's novelistic form. The structure of the novel combines the picaresque with the *bildungsroman*, Gog being a lovable rogue who learns amidst a purportedly realist narrative. This traditional linear realism, however, is gradually and severely compromised by unannounced passages of dream and fantasy, and the unreliable nature of the third-person narration is frequently emphasized by its focalisation through Gog, a confused, transient casualty of war and post-war society:

And surely, Gog himself knows well enough that he is amnesiac and sick and dizzy. All truth is a question of evidence. And there is no evidence, except the evidence of Gog's own memory since his waking in the hospital. And that evidence must be a mixture of the dream and the fact; it must be his recollection of the gone melting into his experience of the immediate; it must be his own remembered history confused with his research into pre-history. (142)

Chapter Two charted the valorisation of empirical evidence in the novels it considered, and the repetition of the word 'evidence' here is instructive. Gog disavows the possibility of empirical truth through its emphasis upon the unreliability of the woozy and confused Gog as the locus of narrative focalization. Once again, it is worth stressing here a simple, yet influential equation repeatedly made by male-authored texts: reliable narrator = stable selfhood = realist text. A disruption of realism and the admission of Gog's focal fallibility are instrumental in the disruption not just of traditional

masculine narrative, but of traditional masculine heroism too. The unpredictability of warfare has compromised Gog's faith in combat as a means of achieving heroic status:

Then I got more scared of bullets than of [Maire]. Not so much of the bullets, but of not dying bravely. I didn't know whether I could stand up under torture, if they caught me spying. I didn't know I wouldn't scream like a baby from a flesh wound. But they didn't wound or catch me. I got through scot-free, except for a scratch on the side of the head that makes it ache a bit. I may still be a coward, I don't know. (230)

The reflex to consider the battlefield the superior arena for forging heroic manhood remains, and it is set in explicit opposition to the writer suffering for his art at home: 'Was not this concentration on proving himself a populist hero on the page an excuse not to have to prove himself a mere man dying perhaps a coward's death for the Republic in Spain? They also serve who only stay home and write. Perhaps. But they serve best who work or fight as men among men' (443). The 'populist hero on the page' as 'excuse'; the judgement strikes at the heart of the masculine texts in the previous chapter, identifying them as fictional compensation. Yet *Gog* depends still more heavily upon the solidarity of its ideal interpretive community for the triumph of its hero, except that this time the manipulation is predominantly philosophical rather than textual. As we have seen, one of the paradoxes of masculinity is that it involves the championing of individual independence and objectivism by means of self-identification and emotional investment in

the membership of a patriarchal institution. Existentialist philosophy, too, is based upon a paradox, in its assertion that freedom emanates from the realisation that all truth is relative, apart from its own founding principles. In *Gog*, a narrative replete with instances of its own subjectivity concludes in a statement of universal 'truth'.

The promise of this eventual superiority of understanding is delivered in part by the text's metafictional aspects. *Gog's* fantastical embellishments turn Magnus Griffin, his illegitimate brother, from a slick businessman into Magog, a monstrous devil wreaking Mammon and machinery on a labile British society. Magnus diagnoses this phantasmagorical subaltern-bashing as follows:

The moment you met me first, you saw how much more attractive and intelligent I was than you, the *legitimate* Griffin. So you made yourself out to be some sort of popular hero, which you weren't. And you projected onto me all you secretly desired and hated in yourself, the Faustian drives to power and knowledge, the ability to organize and control. You ransacked and forged history to gild yourself and blacken me, because you couldn't be me. I am the man you want to be, George, young and successful. In me, there is yourself realized. I am the man of your *Gog*, your *Magog*. (452)

He also hints at the paradox of an ontological system of binary oppositions, a paradox that, in his *Magog* guise, he made plain to *Gog* earlier in the novel: 'Harness me, yoke me, chain me, bind me, keep me within the cage of your lawful desire. But spare me, for you cannot live without me' (127). *Gog*, desperate to ignore the co-dependence of the binary between his brother and

himself, is locked into a cycle of off-loading everything he desires and despises onto him, then desiring and despising him some more. The masculine nature of this self-protection/flagellation aligns him still closer with that 'populist hero' mocked by the text and by Maire.

Magog/Magnus, being male, is sanctioned to strike at the heart of Gog's subaltern-bashing in a way that Maire, with her tetchy jealousy, is not. The binary opposition of gender is left unquestioned in the novel. In the earlier discussion about Gog's difficult re-entry into a peaceful society, a quotation from Gog asserted: 'I'm looking for my true self so hard these days, I seem ready to do anything which my inner nature tells me to do without question' (348-49). This is a striking mixture of essentialism and existentialism, as he struggles to define his essence by means of the assertion of a pre-existent 'inner nature'. This 'nature' is explicitly gendered within the novel. Gog is thrown up, naked and enormous, on a Scottish beach, deposited by an instrument of war onto a land irreparably changed by it. As in *Cards of Identity*, one of the crucial changes has been a disruption of traditional gender roles. *Gog* is populated by a gallery of female grotesques, from Maire and her (fantasized?) lesbian encounters with her female chauffeur who dresses as a man, to Gog's crazed aristocratic mother Merry, to the Fat Girl, who arranges for the detonation of charges in her brothel to titillate customers nostalgic for snatched pleasure during the Blitz. Coming

upon the unfamiliarity of a combine harvester early in his journey, Gog enquires of the weird pair manning it:

‘And all the men who used to reap the corn?’ Gog says. ‘What do they live on now?’

‘They’re all in t’army,’ the pixie says, laughing. ‘If it weren’t fer lads on tractors, t’corn’d rot on t’salk.’

‘There’s e’en lassies on the land now,’ the lad says darkly. ‘Female she-males.’ He spits into the stubble moodily. ‘It’s nasty, wha’ goes on under a skirt e’en if a lass is wearin’ pants, an’ I dinna like it. The land’s a mon’s job, an’ tha’ tha’.’ (61)

In the new nation, all women have become devious whores of various calibres, and as masculine sexuality requires a certain female reluctance in response, satisfactory sex has become inextricably bound up with rape. One of the things that Gog’s ‘inner nature’ has told him to do is to accept the offering by Crook, the satyr-like figure Gog meets in a forest, of a girl he has already raped. For Gog, the reality of rape needs to be overlain with a rape fantasy:

Then Gog buries his face in the soil, projecting images of naked breast and belly and buttock on the screen of his closed lids to hurry on his desire. To perform rape, he has to act out rape in his mind; not the real rape of a red cold bruised plump girl, but the mock rape of the remote tall sneering Maire, stripped of her black coat, her body of cream spilt before him, screaming halt. So Gog has a quick coming, so that he may have a quick going away from his fall and degradation. (117-18)

Gog’s action here seems intended to prompt the reader to probe the acceptable social limits of the existential creed, and the boundary at which a hero becomes an anti-hero. Yet, as with his earlier admission of male guilt,



Gog's level of personal responsibility remains ambiguous. The overlaying of a real rape with an imagined one could well be a feminist comment upon the paradoxical and contemptible state of masculine desire in reaction against a dissolving male dominance, but there are hints too towards a familiar abdication of blame: Gog only acts this way because his wife 'doesn't understand him'.

Reproduction in Albion, the novel implies, has been severely disrupted, with Gog unsure of his paternity and the illegitimate Magnus saying to Gog of their mother: 'I did not ask you here to get nostalgic and drunk about someone who was no real mother to me, but a mere conduit pipe into existence' (448). The uncertainty of origins fostered by a disruption of gender roles is conflated with a loss of national identity, and of male privilege. Women, it is demonstrated again and again, no longer deserve the laurels for creation if they persist in refusing their place within the traditional patriarchal family. Rather, as with Vinson in *Cards of Identity*, an existential creed is utilized to allow men to wrest reproductive power away from the female and to create their own selves. Maire, Gog's wife, is keen to stress the compensatory nature of existentialism in her Solanas-style response to Gog's anguished assessment of the Human Condition:

'Maire, Maire, why can't we have a true past? Why can't we plan the future? Why shouldn't we make sense out of the nonsensical present? [...]



‘Speak for your own sex,’ Maire says grandly. ‘I’ve never understood philosophy. It’s all rot, the sort of thing men waste their time on because they don’t have children. Women are different. They know the truth and they know what’s happened. It’s biological. They’re mothers. They have to pass on the wisdom of the race and all that. The truth all women know is,’ here Maire makes a pregnant pause and then gives birth to a delighted smile and the statement, ‘the truth all women know is that all women know the truth. And men had better believe what women say, or it’ll be the worst for them.’ (410-11)

Gog does not challenge this essentialist connection between birthing and truth (and time and wisdom), but rather seeks to usurp it on behalf of the male existentialist by removing women from the process. Its scenes of metaphorical male birth, like that of *Cards of Identity* over a decade before it, are notably quicker and calmer than the realities of obstetrics. Thus, Gog is reborn over and over again from the topographic features of an unspoilt and lonely landscape by virtue of his choice to continue with his journey; ‘So the speleologist Gog comes out of the bloody womb of the earth to the peak of the high mountain of the fallen tower of might and majesty’ (309); ‘He stands now on his strong legs at the rim of the mothering sea, from which he was retched forth by the pangs of the waves’ (368); ‘Gog issues forth out of the tunnel long as the burrow of a worm’ (424). The novel seeks to appropriate the mystery of birth to add dignity and depth to the philosophy that Maire has mocked as compensatory and shallow. Gog is not born of woman, but of his own will from his own land.

Gabriel Josipovici's novel *The Present* might be properly designated 'existential' in its determined portrayal of the ultimate meaninglessness of existence, and it communicates this contingency through a disruption of literary language and narrative progression. The tenets of existential thought are applied to novelistic form. Published in 1975, it lies outwith the periodization of this thesis, yet serves as an instructive comparison to its fictional predecessors – for its increased formal experimentation, and (as the provision of contraception to women accelerates with the passing decade) its reiteration of masculine anxiety surrounding reproduction. The third-person narrative is focalized through Minna, married to Reg and landlady to Reg's old friend Alex. It interweaves prosaic scenes from life with her husband and lodger with dreams and, gradually, the hallucinations of her mental breakdown. Phrases are repeated muddled and out of context. Tony, an acquaintance ill-met in a pub towards the beginning of the novel, moans to Reg and Minna of his mump-ridden mother-in-law: 'I can't even fuck my wife without her getting up in the middle of it to put some more compresses on the old woman's neck' (14). In a later, surreal sequence with the policeman investigating Alex's suicide, the Inspector announces: 'My mother-in-law has mumps and I can't even fuck my wife without having her get up in the middle of it to see to the old lady' (102). Written in the eponymous present tense, the novel constantly teases with the promise of

habitualization – ‘Saturdays Alex makes the breakfast’ (9); ‘Sundays Miriam comes to lunch’ (16) – without deigning ever to deliver a quantifiable, certain past. The text’s articles, too, hint at referents outwith the present tense without confirming their existence, as in the novel’s opening:

Alex, from the window, describes the scene to them:

‘One of the cars is a grey Ford twenty hundredweight van. It is pushed up against the lamp-post, which is bent protectively over it. There are two people inside. They sit stiff and upright, staring straight ahead of them. The other car is a blue Hillman imp. [...] There is one man inside.’ (7)

‘Them’, ‘the cars’, ‘the lamp-post’: the realism of the text depends upon a referentiality it deliberately fails to provide. The body-count here is instructive too: three people, one pair, one loner, not noticeably alive, just like Minna, Reg and Alex. Minna tells the men at one point: ‘I had a long talk with a chap about teleology’ (109), and the novel flaunts the artifice of its number patterns, with the repetitions of the number three, Reg reading aloud from a book about the importance of the number nine in Celtic tradition, and the tedious numerical calculations of frequent chess games between the two men.

The thwarting of a meaningful existence, then, is replicated by the thwarting of any sense of narrative progression, both in the novel’s increasingly surreal plotlessness, and in its refusal of a past or future tense. The link between a successful life (under the auspices of the patriarchy) and a

successful narrative are reinforced. The cause of this meaninglessness and the interminable nature of the present are explicitly linked to a failure of reproduction far more serious than the conjugal frustrations of Tony and the Inspector. Children are held up as an antidote to the present tense, providing as they do proof of an irrefutable origin, a secular teleology. Minna tells her doctor of her recurring dream of a married life with Alex and their two little girls, then returns to the topic of the stifling stasis of her home:

‘You can’t understand,’ Minna says. ‘It’s like a pressure on the chest or something awful. Talk. Talk. They don’t seem to notice. Only I notice. Then I can’t stand it.’

‘Children,’ the doctor says.

‘Round the chest,’ Minna says. ‘So painful.’

‘Go on,’ the doctor says.

‘I can’t,’ Minna says. ‘There’s no more to say.’

‘The present is very hard to bear,’ the doctor says. He adds: ‘Children introduce the dimension of time.’

‘What?’ Minna says. (76)

Trapped in a childless present, progressive time is an inconceivable concept to Minna. Alex’s presence in their home disrupts the couple’s traditional roles as married couple. He poses as sometime child, then friend, and then lover, bringing Minna roses to the hospital, which she deems ‘inappropriate’ as they signify ‘weddings and love and so on’ (99). Alone with his wife, Reg describes his friend in terms with obvious penile associations (penile rather than phallic as they are fallible rather than powerful):

He turns round and says: ‘He’s so big. And pink. And that moustache.’

'Well?'

'He's just so big and droopy.'

Reg comes back and sits down in the big armchair. Minna watches him.

'The size doesn't matter really,' Reg says. 'It's the droopiness and the pinkness. I can't stand that pinkness.'

'Yes,' Minna says.

'Can you?'

Minna looks at him. He begins to laugh.

He laughs.

When Alex comes in he finds them both laughing. 'What is it now kiddies?' he says.

'You,' Reg says.

'Me?'

'Your droopiness,' Minna says. 'And your pinkness.' (44-45)

Staccato sentences fracture the impression of a progressive act ('He begins to laugh./He laughs'), like a filmic jump-cut. Here, Alex poses as parent of the fake family: Minna and Reg are his 'kiddies'. Reg, in his turn, disrupts the dream-idyll of the fertile marriage (source of two daughters) of Alex and Minna that the latter sees as she sleeps. As the apex of a love-triangle, Minna herself disrupts the homosocial kinship between Reg and Alex:

'You don't understand,' Alex is fond of telling her, 'what friendship is between men. It comes straight down from the heroic past when a woman's place was on a pedestal.'

'Balls,' Minna says. (54)

Minna's reaction to this statement of the traditional female role speaks of the contemporary warping of gender roles. Existential angst is attributed to the dissolution of the social structure of reproductive women within a traditional familial framework. Interestingly, the philosopher John MacQuarrie makes a

similar connection between desirable existential aims and patriarchal social organisation in *Existentialism*:

Like most discoveries contraception is ethically ambiguous – it can enrich interpersonal relations within a responsible context, but it can also arrest community at the stage of being-with-the-other before one comes to being-with-others. The link between sexuality and creativity cannot be severed. If sexuality is the bodily foundation of the simplest kind of community (sexual union or marriage), it is also the act that has the potentiality to found the next order of community, the family. (117)

The family is couched as the 'natural' result of 'normal' sexuality – reproductive sex. *The Present's* experimentation with narrative form, rather than undermining the patriarchal structure, ultimately functions to shore it up. Its focalization through Minna, rather than a radical move towards narratological gender equality in response to the peaking of the Women's Movement, becomes apparent as another example of the diminution of contemporary existence; like her name (mini? minnow? meaner?) it is redolent of the limiting scope of her infertility.

### **The Essentialist Existentialist**

The dynamism of the existential self may initially appear as antithetical to, and redemptive of, personal and political stasis. Yet existentialism may also conceivably be adopted as a glamorous label which



conveniently removes its bearer from the demands of active political engagement precisely so as to deliver him into the covert conservatism revealed in *Cards of Identity*. A rejection of *mauvais foi*, to use the Sartrean term, can leave no *foi* at all. Murdoch, for all her initial optimism over the revolutionary implications of the philosophy, recognizes its potential in practice for political apathy in 'The Existential Political Myth':

I have been suggesting that existentialism can be seen as a mythological representation of our present political dilemma. I think the Marxists are right when they say that a powerful reason for the popularity of existentialism is that it makes a universal myth of the plight of those who reject capitalism but who cannot adjust themselves to the idea of socialism, and who seek a middle way. They seek it, the Marxists might add, in doubt and despair, finding no genuine political road in the centre, but only turnings away to the left and the right. (141)

Existentialism can be misappropriated as a noncommittal compromise between capitalist isolationism and a herd-like socialist collective. The 'doubt' and 'despair' she mentions here is with reference to writers such as Sartre and Camus, committed to unflinchingly intense dramatizations of existential angst in their fiction. In the chapter 'Identity and the Existential' in his *Postwar British Fiction*, James Gordin identifies in the post-war period a continental compromise of radical existential tenets into a less dramatic 'existential attitude':

This attitude seems particularly relevant for the western European since 1945. It offers him the possibilities of freedom and responsible choice, possibilities valuable to the man both bored and frightened by

the implications of Marxist determinism. At the same time the existential attitude prevents man from regarding his truths as sacrosanct, his government as the fount of all wisdom and virtue, and his own nature as a pattern for universal emulation, for the intelligent man can recognize the obvious existence of other fountains and other patterns. Yet, within the plethora of patterns, the responsible man can make distinctions and choices, can prefer quasi-rational muddles to Nazi bestiality simply because the muddles (and what the responsible man prefers is always less clear than what he hates) allow for more free choices than do the zealous brutalities. (236-37)

Couched in Gindin's terms, existentialism begins to take on the air of a happy, if messy, compromise between Marxism and Fascism, allowing its English practitioner a justified conformity with patriarchal society as it stands, together with a simultaneous, and stylish, self-deprecating cynicism. As we have seen so far, existentialism reinterpreted in English male-authored fiction is still likely to emphasize selected truths as sacrosanct, and selected genders and nations as universal templates. Contingency is qualified by gender and by imperialism.

The enormously popular novel *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* (1963) exactly replicates this particular compromised version of existentialist doctrine. Murdoch above makes reference to the 'universal myth' offered by existentialism, and Christopher Booker in his 1969 book *The Neophiliacs* reads the contemporaneous popularity of spy stories as a 'subtle reflection of the *Zeitgeist*' (179). In *Metafiction*, Patricia Waugh's explication of the appeal of the spy thriller also assumes the 'universal' (and thus implicitly trans-gender)

attraction of its existential dilemma, emphasizing this with meticulous equal-opportunities phrasing:

The [spy] thriller is based not upon the same faith in human reason as the detective story but much more upon the fear of anomie, of disorder, of the insecurity of human life. It is much closer to what appears to be the experience of living in the contemporary world. The spy, unlike the detective, but like contemporary men and women, does not know who he or she is looking for. The spy moves in a Kafkaesque world whose laws remain unknown. He or she is forced continually to shift identity, donning one disguise after another. The existential boundary situations that recur frequently in the thriller are experienced vicariously by the reader, who is thus allowed to play through the uncertainties of his or her own existence. (84-85)

An examination of Le Carré's spy thriller, however, reveals that its narrative functions in such a way as to ensure that its conclusion is only compellingly heroic and tragic after the reader's adoption of masculine tenets of belief, together with a nationalistic zeal. The novel's narrative voice is that extra-diegetic third-person narrative that Dorrit Cohn nominates 'psycho-narration' (46), noting the form's potential for rendering verbally a character's thoughts and emotions with a clarity that would seem inauthentic in a first-person account. Yet in *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, the narrator frequently and stubbornly refuses to psycho-narrate, remaining instead in a strange limbo of cognitive privilege in relation to the hero, Alex Leamas, as in this example: 'Fawley didn't like Leamas, and if Leamas knew he didn't care' (16). Leamas's heroism, however, is not compromised by this documentary uncertainty surrounding his interior life. Rather, his identity

derives precisely from this refusal of self-revelation. His masculinity is unreflective and unemotional, setting him impressively apart from his fellow prisoners whilst in jail:

He was contemptuous of his cell mates, and they hated him. They hated him because he succeeded in being what each in his heart longed to be: a mystery. He preserved from collectivisation some discernible part of his personality; he could not be drawn at moments of sentiment to talk of his girl, his family or his children. (46-47)

When he finally succumbs to Liz, his co-worker at his cover-story job at the Bayswater Library for Psychic Research, their intimacy is tantamount to professional and personal failure on his part. Leamas recognises this immediately: 'She made him stay that night and they became lovers. He left at five in the morning. She couldn't understand it; she was so proud and he seemed ashamed' (37). Leamas's act of love makes him vulnerable to feminine weakness and a failure of control. Liz, long susceptible to the dogmatic charms of Marxist doctrine (this being tantamount to weakness), is lured behind the Iron Curtain and eventually shot attempting to escape over the Berlin Wall. Having failed in his duty to rescue her, Leamas delivers himself back into danger on the side of the wall at which she fell, where 'he stood glaring round him like a blinded bull in the arena' (240), before he too is killed. The metaphor employed here is instructive. The bull encapsulates strength and virility even amidst its confusion, of course, but the arena in which it demonstrates these qualities is built and controlled by a greater

power. Waugh's depiction of the function of the spy thriller couches it as some sort of existential playground: a world beyond morality, where existence precedes essence, all belief systems are pointed up as interchangeable, and choice is unfettered. Rather than providing an opportunity to play through existential experiences of contingency, though, the intelligence world of *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* is enclosed within a 'boundary' that is anything but existentialist. The narrative does emphasise the purely subjective nature of one mortal's viewpoint – the reader is unaware for a portion of the novel that Leamas is merely faking treachery so as to achieve the goal of his mission. However, the incomplete nature of this subjectivity is revealed to be characteristic of a position lower down the intelligence hierarchy, for, as Peters confirms with Leamas: 'it's part of our work only to know pieces of the whole set-up' (97). As in *Gog*, the radical possibilities of admitting the instability of subjectivity are countered by the conviction of an absolute, male-controlled morality. Leamas's universe is wholly logocentric and ultimately whole: somewhere, someone knows the truth. That truth, too, is perceived to have a strongly nationalistic stamp – the guarantee of English rational behaviour, the imperial moral high ground. Leamas's Control stresses in his 'donnish bray' (17): 'The ethic of our work, as I understand it, is based on a single assumption. That is, we are never going to be aggressors' (20). Leamas's allegedly existential activity is



ultimately directed at maintaining a colonial, logocentric, patriarchal status-quo.

Nicholas Mosley's 1951 novel *Spaces of the Dark*, like *Gog*, locates the germ of existential awareness of the contingency of human life in its protagonist Paul Shaun outwith the social realities of a contemporary Britain, attributing it to the experience of combat itself, or, more specifically, to the experience of killing. Part II of the novel describes Paul's war experience, and is one of the few sections to be narrated in the first-person. The war-torn landscape of France is shown to be an arena of self-reliance and radical contingency in which a man like Paul can shoot John, his best friend and his commander, in a ravaged barnyard in order to prevent him retreating without orders:

It was that. It was that how it happened (sic). Before morning, in the little light, so easy to have shot him. So easy because there were other shots, because there was movement around us, because there were chips of stone flying off the wall again and it might not even have been I who shot him. (124)

Contrasted with the sections of the novel containing a third-person retrospective narrative, this first-person narration increases the sense of loneliness and desperation, which is then emphasised by a fractured syntax, and the past continuous tense. The focalisation of the passage is through a Paul in combat rather than civilians. Recovering from his injuries in hospital at home, Paul, back in the third-person, is reinterpreting his horrific



experiences in battle in terms of existentialist tenets of belief: 'He thought that sanity lay in the avoidance of loyalties, the denial of ideals, the rejection of all dogma, the development and initiation of the individual soul in defiance of the communal madness. Perhaps he was right. But it brought him little comfort' (130). Rather than distressingly different from an earlier idyll, post-Second World War society is disturbing to Paul precisely for its sense of pre-War stasis. After attending a concert at the Albert Hall with his girlfriend Margaret, John's sister, having heard a piece of music he remembered pouring from a German trench, Paul explodes: 'Everything's the same, that's what's wrong. The war didn't change anything and I can't change anything and nobody can change anything, and that's what's wrong. If a war can't do it nothing can. It's too big, it's too settled, people are all stuck' (89). This stasis is configured as a specifically English condition, chiming with MacQuarrie's point that the English as a race are, for the most part, conditioned to be incapable of an existential awareness. After another outburst in front of his father, Paul bemoans the way in which manners habitually hamper self-expression: 'And now I have spoilt it he thought: I have boasted: I have become hysterical: I have committed two of the unforgivable sins against the Englishman's holy reticence' (157). Margaret, her family, Paul's father – indeed, almost all those to whom he exhibits any urgency of speech – determinedly interpret his existential angst as nervous

exhaustion. They are non-combatants incapable of appreciating either his empirical or existential experience of war. English society as it stands is constructed precisely to provide an anaesthetic to the contingency of existence, and Paul himself is not immune to the attraction of this pleasant numbness, courting as he does the sunny and privileged Margaret.

One character in *Spaces of the Dark*, however, does not respond to his superior philosophy with a bemused concern for the invalid. Paul's baptism into existentialist belief may have taken place on a battlefield littered with men, but unusually this novel does not uphold angst to be entirely gender-specific. Sarah Thorne, an artist and former lover of John, is the catalyst of Paul's intellectual development beyond nausea to enlightenment. In a scene strikingly reminiscent (or perhaps derivative) of Mersault's killing of the Arab in *The Outsider*, Sarah pushes her boyfriend Adam down a flight of stairs to prevent him revealing the secret of John's death. To heighten the sense of personal revelation, the narration at this point is back in the first-person voice of Paul, who says of her: 'If she had had a gun in her hands she would have shot him and they would have hanged her. [...] I have seen a person who would kill not for herself nor for love nor for pride nor even for loyalty, but just because she has to, and that is all those things and more' (230). Taking his leave of her the following dawn, he tells Sarah: 'You have given me the power of tenderness – that is what you did when you acted last

night. You enabled me to turn my care and my pity to something outside myself, made my concentration inside superfluous because for once what was inside of me was resolved by someone else' (243). He has finally apprehended the nature of being-with-others, a concept of moral social existence from Heidegger by way of Sartre, which E. L. Allen sums up as follows: 'Others are there from the outset in relation to myself: I am concerned about them, I have to take account of them in all that I do, and they have to do as much for me. As preoccupation governs our life with things, so concern governs our life with persons' (28).

Respect for this inter-subjectivity is enshrined in the narrative structure of the novel, in that the third-person sections are not focalized exclusively through Paul, but through Sarah as well. When Paul sees Sarah for the first time in a dark booth at the Minotaur Club:

He thought first That's not make-up; and then That's the weariness, that's what has happened to me; and then That's the one thing women never understand, they give their sympathy to anything but that; and then But she knows it, she knows it so much that perhaps it is the only thing that she does know, and he went on looking at her with his weight against a chair.

Sarah saw him and thought I could paint that man; I could paint him because he has nothing in his face except the shape of it, and because I could put in the rest. (66)

Sarah Thorne is an exceptional woman – artistic, independent and 'weary' – so her narrative and philosophical positioning in the text represents more of an isolated innovation than a reversal of traditional gender assumptions.

Nevertheless, her pushing Adam, like her interior revelation in the quotation above, is presented as less a conscious existential choice than an unconscious impulse. Sarah's spontaneity is 'natural' rather than deliberate. The philosophical respect for the discreet existence of others that her act inspires in Paul is undermined by his description of this revelation as 'tenderness': a traditional chivalric response to a damsel in distress.

In *Existentialism*, Jean-Paul Sartre emphasises the relativity of selfhood:

In order to get any truth about myself, I must have contact with another person. The other is indispensable to my own existence, as well as to my knowledge about myself. This being so, in discovering my inner being I discover the other person at the same time, like a freedom placed in front of me, which thinks and wills only for or against me. Hence, let us at once announce the discovery of a world which we shall call inter-subjectivity; this is the world in which man decides what he is and what others are. (44)

Just as existence precedes essence, so inter-subjectivity precedes language. This should imply that language is the ideal medium for conveying the efforts and essence of existential selfhood, yet the post-war male-authored texts under the influence of the philosophy are riddled with an anxiety not dissimilar to that experienced by Jim Dixon at the Merrie England lecture in *Lucky Jim*, fraught as he is with doubt at the possibility of conveying the true nature of his selfhood linguistically. If language is contingent, dynamic and unstable, then theoretically it should be possible to utilize these factors to

demonstrate its affinity with an enlightened conception of selfhood. Doing so, however, would overturn the tenets of masculine selfhood and masculine narrative structure, and time and again in these male-authored novels the latter paradigms prove to be stronger.

In his 1950 pamphlet *What is Existentialism? The Creed of Commitment and Action*, Roland Bailey, ignoring the realist narrative structures and reasonable registers of the fiction of Sartre and Camus, asserts: 'For the most part, existentialists make no effort to be understood. They are inclined to use difficult or obscure language, nor do they set out to be rational in their philosophy. Indeed they state: "Existentialist thought cannot be communicated"' (10). Existentialism as antithetical to communication: this may be a misreading, but it is a pervasive one, and is supported and strengthened by a traditional masculine binary, words *vs.* action, or, in terms of the masculine hero, loquacious sissiness *vs.* silent strength. Colin Wilson's influential existential-ish *The Outsider* reiterates this same point: 'The Outsider problem is essentially a living problem; to write about it in terms of literature is to falsify it. [...] The reason is simple: beyond a certain point, the Outsider's problems will not submit to mere thought; *they must be lived*' (70). Hugh J. Silverman's article 'Sartre's Words on the Self' recognises this concept of a self that is impossible to express in words (as words make the *pour-soi, en-soi*) to be symptomatic of an early stage in Sartre's on-going

development of a more complex relationship between self and verbal expression:

When Sartre claims that this true self is entirely for-itself (*pour-soi*), he means that it cannot be an object for itself and still be itself. So he calls the true self, this being for-itself, *nothingness*. As *nothingness* (*le néant*), the self is a meaning with no referent, an existence with no essence, a consciousness with no object that is other. (89)<sup>1</sup>

To those keen to interpret it as such, this concept of the 'true self' dovetails neatly with an essentialist view. Rather than being nothingness without referent, the self becomes a something with no referent except itself: a pre-existent essence, powerful, pure, and beyond expression. If that self is masculine, then masculinity will thereby be enshrined as pre-verbal and primal.

Thomas Hinde's *Happy as Larry* (1957) nicely demonstrates this manipulation of existentialism for essentialist purposes. At the opening of the novel, Larry Vincent, miserable amidst the stasis of post-war society, demonstrates a nascent awareness of the inauthenticity of his existence. Authentic existence is once again couched as antithetical to contemporary society:

All his life he had been failing because he had not honestly tried, because duty had been something forced on him by relations without his consent – or something selfish, performed because he wanted

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<sup>1</sup> Silverman goes on to trace a movement in Sartre's work from a concept of language as a medium of freedom, to a final concept of a self that is directly communicable in linguistic terms.



approval and at the same time despised himself for wanting it. Now for the first time he honestly wanted to try. Now, at last he understood that the first essential for starting to be a real person was to cease to be a person. (11)

Being a 'real person' is set in opposition to social interaction and subjectivity.

Larry's anxiety over this intuition manifests itself in a profound gulf between what he says and what he really is: 'It left so little time to be alone and discover why he said things. From morning to evening he went from one lie to the next. There was no chance to stop and decide what he thought, and arrange with himself to start saying it' (108-9). For all Larry's talk of 'persons', however, this allegedly human condition is identified throughout the novel as a male one. Larry's failure at modern masculinity, it is implied, began with his failure to conform to life under National Service:

The whole of that time seemed to have been lived under disapproval. The uncles and aunts he had visited on leave had disapproved. His commanding officers had disapproved. It had become clear that he was no good. So he had ceased to try to be any good in the way they wanted. The trouble, of course, was that he was failing to be much good in any other way. (108)

The failure, however, is actually admirable, as it is contemporary masculinity that is inauthentic and incompatible with true manhood. In so far as the novel can be said to have a plot beyond the inexorable progression of Larry's decline, it centres upon Larry's quest to gain possession of an incriminating photograph of his friend Matthew Broom, a lawyer and parliamentary candidate. Matthew's ample money comes, instructively, from his verbosity.

Exactly what the photograph depicts is never made clear (although there are hints that it involves some sort of homosexual encounter), but it is apparent that its circulation in the public world would end Matthew's successful and conformist professional life. The photograph, however unsavoury, connotes the truth, and all those in Larry's circle are complicit in one way or another in concealing it from him. Exemplary contemporary masculinity like Matthew's is a sham, and not masculine enough, with Matthew's implied homosexuality as proof positive. Larry's yearning for an authentic selfhood is directed not towards an existential ideal of freedom, but a recognisably traditional masculine stereotype, nominated by the American sociologist Michael Kimmel in *Manhood in America* as 'the Heroic Artisan' (9):

It was impossible not to think that things had once been different. The money had gone on beer, not the hire-purchase, and occasionally one had felt a man. There had been work in clean air with some rustic tool and at moments in the fourteen-hour day it had been good to feel strong and warm from exercise not central heating. That was the real trouble. It wasn't safe to feel good. You might step backwards into a passing car. (241)

This image of ideal man-/selfhood is a long way from the existential hero, but derived instead from nostalgia for an imaginary unreflective, proletarian, presumably uncommunicative idyll. The novel redesigns the existential quest for self as the hunt for an authentic, essential masculinity. It is not the existential self that is betrayed by language, but this essential male one.

## The Masculine Gaze

In 1964, John Fowles published *The Aristos*, a collection of philosophical aphorisms issued on the back of the success of *The Collector*, though written during the previous decade. The seventy-eighth assertion in the section entitled 'Other Philosophies' reads as follows:

It is to me impossible to reject existentialism though it is possible to reject this or that existentialist action. Existentialism is not a philosophy, but a way of looking at, and utilizing, other philosophies. It is a theory of relativity among theories of absolute truth. (116)

This opposition between a practical awareness of relativity and the artificial imposition of a rational absolutism extends to the Fowlesian scheme of gender roles. In his essay 'Notes on an Unfinished Novel', Fowles makes the claim that: 'My female characters tend to dominate the male. I see man as a kind of artifice, and woman as a kind of reality. The one is cold idea, the other warm fact' (146). In *The Magus*, published in 1966, but largely written, and set, during the previous decade, this Cartesian dualism and its attendant hierarchical assumptions are reinforced amidst a dedicatedly existential framework of thought. In a 1976 interview in *Contemporary Literature* with James Campbell, Fowles identified the novel's hero Nicholas Urfe as 'a typical inauthentic man of the 1945-50 period' (466). The novel centres upon the confrontation of Self and Other, pupil and teacher, the 'inauthentic' Nicholas and the mysterious Conchis. In 'Notes on an Unfinished Novel' – a

documentary of the creative process written alongside *The French Lieutenant's Woman* – Fowles remarks: 'If the technical problems hadn't been so great, I should have liked to make Conchis in *The Magus* a woman' (146). These potential 'technical problems' (presumably involving Conchis's role during Phraxos's occupation), however, do not interfere with Conchis being used to represent what the novel encodes as a 'female principle' of multiplicity, relativity and emotion. In *The Collector* (1963), it is a female character, Miranda, who is used to represent the principles of relativism and existentialism, and to whom the reader has exclusive cognitive privilege via her diary entries. The diary form allows Miranda's expression of her self as a work-in-progress, and not the static passivity that excites her captor Clegg, who can summon sexual excitement only for the pornographic pictures that he takes of her, not for her presence itself. Miranda's quest for authenticity is bound to her realization of her essential femaleness, the discovery of her 'woman-me he can never touch' (258).

In *The Magus*, in a long speech preceding his description of the Nazi torture that took place on Phraxos, Conchis asserts:

These events could have taken place only in a world where man considered himself superior to woman. In what the Americans call 'a man's world'. That is, a world governed by brute force, humourless arrogance, illusory prestige, and primeval stupidity. [...] Men love war because it allows them to look serious. Because it is the one thing that stops women laughing at them. In it they can reduce women to the status of objects. That is the great distinction between the sexes.

Men see objects, women see the relationship between objects. Whether the objects need each other, love each other, match each other. It is an extra dimension of feeling that we men are without and one that makes war abhorrent to all real women – and absurd. I will tell you what war is. War is a psychosis caused by an inability to see relationships. Our relationship with our fellow-men. Our relationship with our economic and historical situation. And above all our relationship to nothingness, to death. (378)

There is a marked contrast here to the way in which the Second World War has appeared in the other existentially-influenced novels considered in this chapter. In *Gog*, for example, and *Spaces in the Dark*, war has prompted existential conversions precisely because of its revelation of the relativity of value systems, not its antithesis to relativity. Initially, then, this seems to be a radical philosophical assumption – woman as intellectually (if instinctively) aware, man bogged down amidst the material. However, the novel's focalization through Urfe draws the reader towards other conclusions. The retrospective first-person narrative allows a certain amount of criticism to be directed towards the inauthentic Nicholas, but as Bruce Woodcock notes in his *Male Mythologies: John Fowles and Masculinity*, any critique of his compromised selfhood is complicated by the narrative itself:

The book itself acts to seduce the reader – perhaps we should specify the male reader – into an imaginary pursuit of the very fantasies it exposes. It repeatedly suggests the promise of imaginative access to women figures, real or fantastic, who are part of the basic idea of the book as Fowles has crucially described it – 'a secret world, whose penetration involved ordeal and whose final reward was self-knowledge'. (63)



Nicholas is able to recognize that his attraction towards the pure, chaste, Edwardian Lily is based upon a longing for a time of more simplistic gender roles and more clearly-defined binary hierarchisms:

Perhaps it was partly a nostalgia for that extinct Lawrentian woman of the past, the woman inferior to man in everything but that one great power of female dark mystery and beauty; the brilliant, virile male and the dark, swooning female. The essences of the two sexes had become so confused in my androgynous twentieth-century mind that this reversion to a situation where a woman was a woman and I was obliged to be fully a man had all the fascination of an old house after a cramped, anonymous modern flat. (227)

Lily functions, of course, as the antithesis to her less inhibited sister Rose (the quaint imagery of their names increasing the sense of nostalgia), but more importantly in opposition to Alison, whose antipodean origin emphasises her identity as the novel's New Woman. Alison is far from providing 'imaginary access' to 'a secret world': she flaunts a sexual availability contemporary to the date of the novel's publication rather than its setting. The essence of her 'female dark mystery' is utterly compromised by her enthusiasm for sex. Yet a solution to Nicholas's inauthenticity must be fashioned from his contemporary environment. His revelation is couched in explicitly existential terms:

But now I *felt* it; and by 'feel' I mean that I knew I *had* to choose it, every day, even though I went on failing to keep it, had every day to choose it, every day to try to live by it. And I knew that it was all bound up with Alison; with choosing Alison, and having to go on choosing her every day. (601)



Alison's symbolic function has, however, become hopelessly confused by this point. On the one hand, she is chosen because her sex allows her to see 'the relationships between objects', the uncertainty and relativity of existence; on the other because she has been 'cast as Reality' (608) by virtue of the 'warm fact' of her body. She is forced into two enduring but antithetical feminine roles simultaneously: she represents both unknowable mystery and honestly available corporeality. This confusion permeates the novel's conclusion. That this conclusion represents a didactic climax is inarguable: Nicholas finally realises that Conchis is not watching him, that he is free and that God is only a game ('the theatre was empty', 617), and so becomes an authentic subject. His liberation, though, is demonstrated by a gesture that is far from progressive: he slaps Alison across the face, rebelling against his choice of her and against Conchis and all the 'female principles' enveloped in the Magus. He achieves heroism by his rejection of the feminine, and by the assertion of his gloriously isolated selfhood, the former a necessary step to achieving the latter. The intended symbolic power of his liberation is derived from the establishing of the Other as feminine in order for him triumphantly to reject that other and choose himself: authentic existential selfhood established with a traditional masculine gambit.

In the 1969 novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the conflation of existentialist principles with enduring masculine archetypes and traditional

structures of narrative and textual authority is still more explicit. In 'Notes on an Unfinished Novel' Fowles claims that in it he is 'trying to show an existential awareness before it was chronologically possible. [...] It has always seemed to me that the Victorian Age, especially from 1850 on, was highly existentialist in many of its personal dilemmas' (140). Nowhere, in 'Notes on an Unfinished Novel', or elsewhere, does Fowles explicitly state exactly what he understands this 'existential awareness' to involve. In a 1976 interview with James Campbell in *Contemporary Literature*, Fowles was asked if he was aware that all his male heroes 'come to a greater awareness of their real selves in the arms of women?' He replied: 'Yes, especially in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. This is the sort of existential thesis of the books – that one has to discover one's feelings' (466). The vagaries of his response here, in references to 'the sort of existential thesis', and the blurring of existentialism into a definition of emotional literacy ('one has to discover one's feelings'), are revealing. A later assertion in *The Aristos* demonstrates a more distinct determination to code existentialism as inherently female, as well as providing a good indication of the mythic and dualistic nature of Fowles's feminism:

Adam is stasis or conservatism; Eve is kinesis, or progress. Adam societies are ones in which the man and the father, male gods, exact strict obedience to established institutions and norms of behaviour, as during a majority of the periods of history in our era. The Victorian is a typical such period. Eve Societies are those in which the woman and

the mother, female gods, encourage innovation and experiment, and fresh definitions, aims, modes of feeling. The Renaissance and our own are typical such ages. (157)

Woman is associated with creativity, with innovation, with *freedom*. Rather than destroying the binary organisation of gender identities or changing the traditional connotations of femaleness, Fowles attempts to make them positive, in much the same way that D. H. Lawrence, another hero of Sixties liberation, does in the opposition of darkness and light. In this supposedly 'unstyled' work, however, negative implications and traditional archetypes still linger in the reference to Eve. Woman is simultaneously figured as symbolic of existential relativity, yet prized for and envied her essence, her desirable facticity against Man's detached rationality. Towards the end of the novel, Sarah is referred to as 'the protagonist' (348), but the basis for such a judgement is unclear. She is patently the catalyst for Charles's journey towards an authentic self, precisely because, in pop-psychology phraseology, she is 'in touch with her feelings', and with those of others: the narrator refers to 'that fused rare power that was her essence – understanding and emotion' (54). She is more emotionally and sexually aware than Charles, free from repressive convention. She represents corporeality, she represents 'warm fact'.

Yet this particular feminine essentialist ideal is contradicted in the novel's narrative by its adoption of another, contradictory representation of

its purported protagonist. The narrative denies all cognitive and psychological access to Sarah. Descriptions of her throughout the book, but particularly when Charles meets her on the Undercliff, are peppered with noncommittal phrases like 'seems', 'as if', and 'looks as though'. (In this way, of course, her culpability in Charles's social downfall is complicated.) Such a portrayal provides a marked contrast with the narrative authority exerted over Ernestina, whose most fleeting 'sexual thought' (30) while writing her diary is recorded by the narrator. To put it brutally, Ernestina the virgin is the narrative's whore, and Sarah the whore the narrative's impenetrable virgin. Of course, the fifth chapter, which contains the diary scene, functions to poke fun at the simplistic omniscience of Victorian novelistic conventions, so the denial of rational access to Sarah might be interpreted as the logical move of a didactic existential fiction – fostering respect for the individual's freedom despite the impossibility of knowing the nature of that freedom – were it not riddled with appeals to such a recognisable role. 'Who is Sarah?' asks the narrator, thereby ushering in all the postmodern self-reflexivity of the succeeding chapter, Chapter Thirteen. 'Out of what shadows does she come?' (84). The answer can be unhesitating: she comes direct from the Romantic feminine – from an image of woman as shadowy mystery. Sarah's symbolic role in the existential condition is utterly contradictory. On one hand, her corporeality qualifies her as existential

agent, as authentic, embodied existence rather than abstract theory. On the other, her intangible mystery makes her a demonstration of existential contingency. Nothing is something in this novel, and that something is Sarah: she is contingency made sexy. Her role as hazard, as the uncertainty principle, becomes increasingly identified with her sexuality, as the novel dares to play with the disruptive potential of female desire. Hidden in the jungle of the Undercliff, privy to the lovemaking of Mary and Sam, Charles interprets Sarah's smile to say: 'Where are your pretensions now, those eyes and gently curving lips seemed to say; where is your birth, your science, your etiquette, your social order?' (162). Making his escape, 'Charles's thoughts on his own eventual way back to Lyme were all variations on that agelessly popular male theme: "You've been playing with fire, my boy"' (164), and it is exactly this theme that forms the novel's textual thrill, as the unpredictable nature of the universe is identified with the female and with female sexuality.

As with the case of Alison in *The Magus*, the existential Other in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* comes to be represented by a confusing mixture of feminine stereotypes: Sarah is simultaneously accessible through her body (as woman = corporeality) and yet beyond it (as woman = mystery). The angst surrounding this unstable symbolic construction reaches a climax in the sex between Charles and Sarah, with the reader's awareness that her



hobbled and helpless situation is a constructed pose (she has bought the bandage to bind her 'damaged' ankle in advance), and the discovery that the French Lieutenant's 'whore' is in reality a virgin. Sarah is revealed as active in her own passivity (she has bought the bandage that makes her so delectably immobile for Charles in advance), innocent in her wantonness. This scene does to some extent deconstruct the artificial nature of the Madonna/whore dichotomy, but it also demonstrates the anxiety and confusion that results in the destruction of that binary opposition. The existential nothingness that she is employed to represent is not empty, but full of this terrifying confusion of feminine roles. This ambiguity of status may be compared with another way in which Sarah's existential authenticity is undermined by a traditional feminine role. The novel's intertextual use of the Marie de Morell story encourages the textual confusion of Sarah and her relationship with Charles with Marie and *her* French lieutenant, a confusion that leaks into the novel's title.

In her essay 'The Look in Sartre and Rich', Julien S. Murphy notes the potential violence of the look:

From a Sartrian perspective, the look of the other can rob us of our possibilities, alienate us from ourselves and our options for choice, and make us feel in the service of the other. The impact of the look can be so devastating that it reduces us, at a glance, to powerlessness, to the status of a thing. The recognition that we are always under the gaze of the other evidences that our freedom is held in constant check. We live, to varying degrees, as objects in the world of others. (102)



In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Charles's first meeting with Sarah on the quay is self-consciously Sartrean:

She turned to look at him – or as it seemed to Charles, through him. It was not so much what was positively in that face which remained with him after that first meeting, but all that was not as he had expected; for theirs was an age when the favoured feminine look was the demure, the obedient, the shy. [...]

Again and again, afterwards, Charles thought of that look as a lance; and to think so is of course not merely to describe an object but the effect it has. He felt himself in that brief instant an unjust enemy; both pierced and deservedly diminished. (13)

Her look is likened to a lance, with all the phallic and penetrative implications of that simile, and this is an image that is used repeatedly in the novel for Sarah's looking. She looks at Charles as if he were an object; she makes him aware of his object-status within her subjectivity. Her gaze, a female gaze, is, at this point, active. In her essay 'Sartre on Objectification', Phyllis Sutton Morris makes a point that has resounding implications for a consideration of the relationship between existentialist and masculine principles:

According to the standard Cartesian view, the human subject is a nonphysical mental substance separable from, but interacting with, the nonconscious bodily machine. However, for many existential phenomenologists, including Sartre, the continuing subject of conscious experience and action is the human body. A nonphysical, invisible, intangible subject would be hidden from public view. To be a *bodily* subject, however, is *necessarily* to be experientially accessible to others – that is, to be a possible object of others' perception. (65)

To be aware of yourself as the object of another's look is simultaneously to be

aware of yourself as bodily subject. It is also to be aware of the other's self, both as existent and inaccessible to your own perception. In 1975, Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' announced its initial intention as the use of psychoanalytic theory as a political weapon. Aspects of her argument have been regularly and comprehensively criticised since, primarily by means of accusations of essentialism and over-simplification, but its basic tenets remain relevant in this examination of the literary representation of subjectivity. To hazard a brief summation: the essay classified the tradition of Hollywood narrative cinema by means of the fact that its gaze (of the camera, and by implication, of the audience) was 'male'. The male gaze is defined by the fact that it is active, and to achieve this power, the female object in film is routinely styled to connote passivity, to constitute '*to-be-looked-at-ness*' (19), rather than an active, looking, subject position. Mulvey's political assertion, then, is that the construction of looking in Hollywood cinema establishes limits on women's agency. The spectator sees through the eye of the camera which in turn 'sees' through the eye (and the 'I') of the character who does the looking. Through this privileged gaze, film viewers, regardless of their actual gender, are treated (and hence re-constructed) as masculine subjects:

As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active

power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. (20)

The threat of the female Other is met with two distinct responses. Mulvey distinguishes between the voyeuristic look, which wants to know its object, and by knowing her is able to control and explain her. The fetishistic look, in contrast, does *not* want to know, its bearer is happily captivated by what he sees, comforted, delighted with the symbolic, and reluctant to see beyond it.

There is a great deal at stake for masculinity within these two distinctive looks: Mulvey's has profound political implications, and Sartre's profound ontological ones. The Sartrean look, precisely because it is defined by lack (inability to know the other), is rejected in the narrative of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* for the masculine gaze, objectifying the woman, eroticizing the object, and suppressing the possibility of difference in the reader. As E. Ann Kaplan points out in 'Is the Gaze Male?': 'The gaze is not necessarily male (literally), but to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the masculine position' (331). The narrative's contentment 'not to know' Sarah turns her into what Mulvey describes as a fetish: it objectifies her. Later in the novel, the narrator says of Charles:

He perceived that her directness of look was matched by a directness of thought and language – that what had on occasion struck him before as a

presumption of intellectual equality (therefore a suspect resentment against man) was less an equality than a proximity, a proximity like a nakedness, an intimacy of thought and feeling hitherto unimaginable to him in the context of a relationship with a woman. (159)

With the reflex reference to 'nakedness', Sarah's intellectual challenge to Charles is immediately sexualized. In this way, the radical potential of Sarah's apparent early control of the gaze is denied. The narrative makes her a fetish, not a feminist.

In his Foreword to the 1977 revised edition of *The Magus*, Fowles claims the new version to be predominantly 'a stylistic revision' (5), although 'the erotic element is stronger in two scenes' (7). (Both of these involve Nicholas's encounters with Lily/Julie – Chapters 49 and 58 in the 1977 version – and not with Alison, unique in the first novel in her sexual availability to him. As Urfe's ultimate Romantic destiny, intimacy with Alison, though acknowledged to include shadowy men on the verges of the plot, like Pete, must exclude the immasculated reader.) Fowles admits of the novel published in 1966: 'I might have declared a preferred aftermath less ambiguously ... and now have done so' (7). Interestingly, in the light of the preceding discussion of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, this 'preferred aftermath', one of an on-going relationship of love and equality between Nicholas and Alison, is made less ambiguous in part by means of a more active role for Alison in the dynamics of looking in the final chapter. In the

1977 revision, Nicholas has learned to see 'the relationships between objects', and his looking at Alison is no longer gazing, unlike the man in the tea pavilion in both versions, whose 'eyes follow her out through the door' (1966: 608, 1977: 647)<sup>1</sup>. His look at Alison has become fully Sartrean, making him aware of his own status as object, and his love and need of her. Alison, for her part, aware of the vulnerability inherent in looking (and thus showing lack) to a man who has betrayed her, determinedly refuses to look at Nicholas. Phrases in the 1966 version which convey her subservience to him through her continual surrender to looking at him: 'She was looking down, then up, straight at me' (607); 'as I stared at her, unable to speak, at her steady, bright look' (607); are systematically altered in the 1977 reissue; 'She was looking down at the table, not at me' (647); 'I stared at her, unable to speak, at her refusal to return my look' (647). Alison, aware of the reciprocity of need that she requires from Nicholas's look, is loathe to risk meeting his eyes, and autonomous enough to resist doing so. Nicholas, rather than exhibiting the petulant, bullying rage towards Alison of the end of the 1966 version, confesses secretively to the reader only that 'it infuriated me that she would not look at me' (1977: 648). Alison initially allows herself 'a little, lancing look' (647) (as with 'cryptic colouring' just below this phrase,

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Magus* 1977, 'out' is omitted from the phrase.

the language of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is leaking into the encounter), before her emotion overrides control:

'I hate you. I *hate* you.'

I said nothing, made no move to touch her. After a moment she looked up and everything in her expression was as it had been in her voice and words: hatred, pain, every female resentment since time began. But I clung to something, the something I had never seen, or always feared to see, in those intense grey eyes, the quintessential something behind all the hating, the hurtiness, the tears. A small step poised, a shattered crystal waiting to be reborn. She spoke again, as if to kill what I was looking at.

'I *do*.' (655)

Nicholas, now, is looking, not gazing, and this epiphany is prompted, as in the 1966 novel, by his realisation that 'there were no watching eyes' (1966: 617, 1977: 654). Freedom, the couple's mutual freedom, is a refusal of the gaze – of giving, or enduring it. Existential freedom, in other words, has become more clearly defined as a different kind of seeing: 'A hundred yards away a blind man was walking, freely, not like a blind man; only the white stick showed he had no eyes' (1966: 616, 1977: 654)<sup>1</sup>.

As if in direct response to Mulvey's 1975 essay, the eponymous protagonist of Fowles's 1977 novel *Daniel Martin* writes film scripts for Hollywood narrative films, and the novel sets out explicitly to interrogate the links between masculinity, literary form and ways of seeing. This later novel,

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1977 novel, this description is punctuated slightly differently: 'A hundred yards away a blind man was walking, freely, not like a blind man. Only the white stick showed he had no eyes' (654).



schooled perhaps by Mulvey, but certainly by a burgeoning feminist rhetoric as the 1970s progressed, exhibits a much deeper awareness of the sexual politics of looking. The American film industry is identified throughout the novel as both symbol and agent of capitalism and reification. Daniel himself harbours a profound mistrust of first-person narration:

In his already rather low valuation of the novel [...] he reserved an especially, and symptomatically, dark corner for first-person narration; and the closer the narrative *I* approximated to what one could deduce of the authorial *I*, the more murky this corner grew. The truth was that the objectivity of the camera corresponded to some deep psychological need in him; much more to that than to the fundamental principle of aesthetic (and even quasi-moral) good taste that he sometimes pretended lay behind his instinct here. (72)

The text dramatizes the reflex masculine association of first-person narration with the subjective and thus the unreliable. An 'I' is manipulated to appear subject to emotion, whim and change in a way that a 'he' is not. When Daniel narrates in the first-person his spontaneous (and sentimental) decision to invite Jane to Egypt with him, a reactionary pronoun-shift occurs immediately afterwards: 'Then he began to wonder what he had done' (448). Dan's room at Oxford is noted to have 'had at least fifteen mirrors on its walls' (61), an affectation his fellow students took to indicate a jest-worthy self-love, but:

Perhaps that ancient jibe about him, Mr Specula Speculans, had not been quite fair: a love of mirrors may appear to be only too literally *prima facie* evidence of narcissism, but it can also be symbolic of an

attempt to see oneself as others see one – to escape the first person, and become one's own third. (72)

Bruce Woodcock notes in *Male Mythologies* how Dan's trait is extended into a metafictional comment upon the gendered workings of the text:

In order to indicate his *own* attention to this process of male bias active in fiction, Fowles focuses our attention on the ambivalent slippage between 'I' and 'he' which keeps entering Dan's novel, a prevarication of pronouns which counterpoints the deviousness of Dan's male persona and his attempts to distance or escape it. (124)

Authorial complicity in the male viewpoint, and the awareness of that complicity, is emphasised by Dan's speculative name for his putative hero, 'S. Wolfe': this is, of course, an anagram of 'Fowles'. The third-person narrator notes of Dan: 'He didn't like the name and knew he would never use it, but this instinctive rejection gave it a useful kind of otherness, an objectivity, when it came to distinguishing between his actual self and a hypothetical fictional projection of himself' (449). This distinction between the subjectivity of the first-person and the objectivity of the third is an illusion. Fowles conveys his knowing collaboration in the illusion by means of this 'prevarication of pronouns' to heighten the metafictional demonstration of literary artifice. As it is for Dan, this clash between the objective and the subjective is portrayed beyond a 'fundamental principle of aesthetic' into a 'deep psychological need'. This need, tellingly, is presented as a universal, one: the debate between 'I' and 'he' slips into one over 'we'

and 'I':

He argued about it with Jane one evening: whether the acute new awareness of self – its demands, its privileges, its rights – that had invaded the Western psyche since the First World War was a good thing or a largely evil consequence of capitalist free enterprise ... whether people had been media-gulled into self-awareness to increase the puppet-master's profits or whether it was an essentially liberalizing new force in human society. Predictably Jane took the first, and Dan the second view. (555)

The gendered source of these arguments about individualism and collectivism is recognisable from other novels considered in this chapter (Marxism was branded feminine in Le Carré's novel) and relates once more to Fowles's overriding ethos: women relate to others, and embrace relativity, more 'naturally' than men.

In addition to its 'prevarication of pronouns', *Daniel Martin* draws attention to the tense of traditional masculine narration, quibbling with the favoured retrospective mode as antithetical to lived experience:

A novel is written in the two past tenses: the present perfect of the writer's mind, the concluded past of fictional convention. But in terms of the cramped and myopic fictional present ... if Jenny accuses Dan (has still, of course, in the chronology of this reconstruction, hardly put pencil to paper, let alone had Dan read the result) of a love of loss, she is being disingenuous, since she knows he likes her too much to hurt her; that if she insists, they continue. (269)

With these complex metafictional machinations, we are back in familiar existentialist literary territory, with a worrying at the gulf between the tenets of existence and of literature. Dan sleeps with Jane, his fiancée's sister, while

at university:

Our surrender to existentialism and each other was also, of course, fraught with evil. It defiled the printed text of life; broke codes with a vengeance; and it gave Dan a fatal taste for adultery, for seducing, for playing Jane's part that day. It might seem good, as great yet immoral art can be good; good in sacrificing all to self; but we didn't realize the non-exchangeability of life and art. In reality that day Dan did not understand what was happening; that as he had been led in, so must he be led out. (104)

Predictably, sex is here used to symbolize a reality that cannot be fettered within literary artifice: the sex act is an existential one. Ironically, of course, the passage cannot help but prompt aesthetic associations – Eve may not be mentioned by name, as she is in *The Aristos*, but Dan's existential epiphany still occurs within a tradition of female seduction and original sin. The gulf between action and words is understood as an essentially English dilemma:

Perhaps all this is getting near the heart of Englishness: being happier at being unhappy than doing something constructive about it. We boast of our genius for compromise, which is really a refusal to choose; and that in turn contains a large part of cowardice, apathy, selfish laziness – but it is also, I grow increasingly certain of this as I grow older, a function of our peculiar imagination, of our racial and individual gift for metaphor; for allowing hypotheses about ourselves, and our pasts and futures, almost as much reality as the true events and destinies. (83)

Narrative is diagnosed as the cause of national stasis. Englishness is assumed to be antithetical to existentialist action, and its literary tradition, realist or otherwise, is exposed as unreal. It is worth pausing at this point to assess the magnitude of the associations being made in this novel.

First-person narration has been conflated with emotion, solipsism and subjectivity; third-person narration with control, reification and objectivity. Dan has been conflated with Fowles, and by implication, all male authors, in his problems of self-expression. These problems are linked to a long-standing Western cultural confrontation between the principles of individualism and those of community. Masculinity and selfhood are in crisis. Just as literary practices are shown to mirror lived experience, however, the ultimate incompatibility of words and life is emphasized, and the stasis caused by story-telling is characterized as a quintessentially English one.

Despite making this iconoclastic connection between masculinity, selfhood, nationality and narrative, however, the novel's relationships and conclusions are disappointingly traditionalist. The ultimate vision of community occurs to Dan while part of a naked ring waist-deep in the Mediterranean: Nell, his fiancée, and her sister Jane are present, but Dan has eyes for only one link in the circular chain:

The profound difference between Anthony and myself – and our types of mankind – is that I did for a few moments there feel unaccountably happy; yet I could see that for him, the supposedly religious man, this was no more than a faintly embarrassing midnight jape. Or I can put it like this: he saw me as the brother-in-law he liked, I saw him as the brother I loved. It was a moment that had both an infinity and an evanescence – an intense closeness, yet not more durable than the tiny shimmering organisms in the water around us. (125)



Jane's femaleness and her Marxism are conflated, and her traces of individualism are characterized, like Murdoch's by Conradi, as non-female:

She remained different; she reminded me slightly of one or two women writers I had known – of a withholding, not exactly male, but springing from an independence of feeling that was also not female; that came perhaps in their case from the experience of the retreat into the imagination, but which in isolating them from the commonality of their sex, isolated them too from the other. (337)

Other female characters are also loaded with symbolism by Dan, from his childhood peasant-girl love Nancy, from whom he learnt that women are 'much, much nicer, softer, more mysterious' (412), and Jenny, who like Alison in *The Magus*, is attractive for 'her franknesses and simplicities, her presentness' (177). This tendency to make symbols of women may be mocked in Dan, but *Daniel Martin* provides no alternative model for male fiction to follow. Fowles's feminism falls short: so short that its central tenet brings to mind a couplet from the poetry of Kingsley Amis: 'Women are really much nicer than men: / No wonder we like them' ('A Bookshop Idyll', 57). This novel about an existential quest for an authentic selfhood that merges individual integrity with communal care, for 'whole sight' (7), ends in a statement of peculiarly cheerful despair that the questions it raises can never be answered:

That evening, in Oxford, leaning beside Jane in her kitchen while she cooked supper for them, Dan told her with suitable irony that at least he had found a last sentence for the novel he was never going to write. She laughed at such fragrant Irishry; which is perhaps why, in the



end, and in the knowledge that Dan's novel can never be read, lies eternally in the future, his ill-concealed ghost has made that impossible last his own impossible first. (704)

The irony is, of course, that Fowles's own novel has just been read, and replicates and perpetuates the very masculine fictional mores that it mocks in its fictional writer.

This chapter began with a quotation from E. L. Allen that suggested the potential of existentialism to revolutionise masculine conceptions of self and narrative: *'Existentialism is an attempt at philosophizing from the standpoint of the actor instead of, as has been customary, from that of the spectator'* (3). Yet purely by virtue of its status as a philosophy, and the apprehension of philosophy, as an intellectual pursuit, as inherently male, existentialism provides for many of the male authors considered here an attractive means of masculine consolation. Though existentialism might have been conceived to achieve the valorisation of human subjectivity, relativity and interaction, its apprehension from within a system of thought which bases its definition of self on the antithesis to others confuses these tenets with pervasive and contradictory systems of value. Existentialism is upheld as a creed of rational decision, ensuing action and repeated self-imposition on to the world. Acting pour-soi is more commonly represented as 'acting upon': acts of heterosexual intercourse which require female unwillingness in order to be existentially 'authentic' are a case in point. The novels under consideration

have demonstrated the way in which the existential action-man can simultaneously spectate. In its interpretation of existentialism, masculine epistemology confuses the cultural imposition of its own terms of value with naturally-given traits both of gender and of race. The patriarchal pay-off within this covert system is a dual one. Dynamic existentialist selfhood is stabilized by the traditional ontological security of manhood, while masculinity is elevated from a matter of passive inheritance to a dynamic, heroic achievement of essence. The masculine self becomes more gloriously isolated, achieved in the individual mind, as well as inherited by virtue of certain bodily characteristics. Such duality is indicative of the doublethink of gender, which requires the concept to be both intrinsic and natural, and dynamic and mutable. To resurrect John MacInnes's apposite phrase once again, 'we are left swinging from penis to phallus' (78). When existentialism is examined in masculine narrative, its radical implications will always be subsumed by the paradox of this mode of thinking. To effect an authentic liberation from the limitations of masculine conceptions of selfhood, male-authored fiction needs the motivation to reimagine its narrative models.

## Chapter Four: Non-Conformity and the Sixties

In general, generalization is to lie, to tell lies.

B. S. Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (1969)

Popular iconography of the Sixties in Britain immortalises a decade triumphant in its counter-culture, a sustained rebellion with effects more far-reaching and far more real than the conservative rantings of the Angries and the Outsiders of the English Fifties. We are encouraged to retain a dominant fiction of an era liberated by satire, chemical stimulants and contraception, its audaciously-won freedoms enshrined in the national culture by a rush of liberal legal reforms at the end of the decade<sup>1</sup>. In his cultural commentary *The Seventies*, Christopher Booker tracks a British impetus towards what he calls 'individual self-realization' from the end of the 1950s onwards, and is decisive in his nomination of the two areas in which this change was at its most dynamic:

In essence this mighty impulse, first appearing in the form of the Romantic Movement, was a revolt against structure, order, discipline – a reaction in the name of 'life' against the dehumanization of an increasingly machine-dominated, money-conscious, bureaucratic civilization. And it showed itself nowhere more than in the arts and in the realm of sexual morality. (31)

In its consideration of fictional negotiations of both essentialist and existentialist masculine selves, this thesis has already considered a number of

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<sup>1</sup> Examples being the abolition of Capital Punishment (1965), the Wolfendon Report on homosexuality (1967), the Abortion Act (1967), and the end of theatre censorship (1968).

novels produced by male authors during the decade. This chapter does not attempt an exclusive periodization of the 1960s as it omits novels falling within the era and includes novels written outside it. It seeks to engage instead with the concept of 'the Sixties' touched on above, and particularly with the perception that its innovations were most notable in the realms of Art and Sex. Reimagining (heterosexual) gender relationships outwith the spawning patriarchal family, as we have seen in previous chapters, has the potential radically to disrupt the masculine textual paradigm, resulting in a change in novelistic form. The dates of the era referred to as 'the Sixties', then, are skewed from the decimal, beginning around 1964 with the election of Harold Wilson and his resurrection of Kennedy-esque rhetoric in proclamations of new frontiers and revolutions, and ending at the brink of the period considered by this thesis, 1971. In *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960-75*, Robert Hewison is sure in his judgement upon the nebulous nature of the Sixties zeitgeist:

Youth, classlessness and a third factor which might be loosely summarized as 'sex, drugs and rock'n'roll', formed the ideological underpinnings of what has become identified as the Sixties style. Since these words suggest images, values or states of being rather than concrete ideas, it is not surprising that we have to talk of style, rather than anything as coherent as a philosophy. (61)

As we have seen in our consideration of the concept of masculinity thus far, a

lack of 'concrete' foundations does not exclude an idea from enormous social and artistic influence (just as the idea of 'a philosophy' does not guarantee coherence, or lack of contradiction). The male-authored novels considered here are chosen for their formal innovation (though this is admittedly limited amongst English fiction of the period, with the bulk of the experimentation of this period contained in the work of women [Eva Figes, Ann Quin] or 'outsiders' like the Scot Alan Burns), for their engagement with these received Sixties themes of moral and behavioural revolution (freedom from class, freedom of sex and of youth, and of personal expression for the artist), and with familiar expectations of the Sixties as a time of liberated artistic experimentation. Drugs fuel plots, holes are sliced into pages, sexual encounters are elaborated rather than implied, and the easy identifications between readers, heroes and authors we saw elicited and fostered in Chapters Two and Three, are thereby complicated and compromised.

Of course, this narrative of a communal progression of literary expression and human liberation, is, like all narratives, to some extent contrived. In *Harvest of the Sixties*, Patricia Waugh reads the pervading mood of the decade in England as one of the culmination of prolonged economic and political pessimism. As David Cannadine notes of the three decades following the Second World War in *Class in Britain*: 'Internationally, Britain gradually but inexorably declined from being a first-ranking world

power, the Empire was dismantled with astonishing rapidity between 1947 and 1968, and the pound sterling was twice devalued' (145-46). In the previous chapters we saw the pessimism surrounding the lack of cohesive social and international dominance of English men to be expressed and repulsed in their fiction in two distinct ways. Some authors chose to reassert the cohesion of the male community by championing an empiricism established in advance as a masculine trait, some to assert individualism through a compromised version of continental existentialism. Either way, rational decision, and the actions resulting from it, were gendered male and upheld as eminent. The Welfare State, however its mechanisms might be mistrusted for their interference with class hierarchies and paternal control of the family, was for the most part accepted as the inevitable apotheosis of rational and patriarchal statehood. In contrast, Waugh notes a marked shift in the mid-60s towards a view that enlightened reason, and the social planning emanating from it, is in fact a mode of technocratic instrumentalism that reaches its gory climax in the arms race. A counter-cultural response to this realisation was simple and extreme: a rejection of all reason as oppressive and debilitating. For the cultural majority, however, anti-rationalism was disturbingly difficult to distinguish from the uncompromising capitalist individualism asserted by the extreme right. Thus, Waugh claims:



From the sixties onwards, in fact, there was a growing intellectual rejection of the extreme countercultural abandonment of rationality and a concomitant concern to find ways to redefine reason in non-instrumental or in other than narrowly functionalist ways. (121)

The redefinition of rationality so as to place emphasis elsewhere than on its empirical results – a severance of reason and action – such a desired step can be assumed to involve seismic disturbances in the previously delineated masculine paradigms of selfhood, the essential and the existential.

Previously, the masculine had routinely been defined in opposition to feminine irrationality, and its credentials paraded in public, instrumental demonstration. One of the prevailing concerns of the 1960s, according to Robert Hewison, was to reverse the flow of this outward self-assertion: 'The convention was to ignore all boundaries and conventions, and as far as possible to escape the imposed definitions of material reality by exploring inner space' (86). The valorisation of inner space does not involve ignoring boundaries, of course, but rather a reversal of binary hierarchies, so that public comes to equal conflict and oppression, and the private a fabled space of sanctuary. Established definitions of masculine selfhood are in jeopardy.

Alongside this renegotiation of reason, another legacy of the decade might be heralded as its initiation of new modes of public and political discourse, and of new ways of locating each person culturally and relatively within those discourses. In a self-fulfilling cycle, encouraged by the rising

prominence of various social groups – immigrants, students, Hippies – people began to envisage themselves not within the traditional vertical (and phallic?) hierarchies of class and attendant privilege, but rather upon horizontal social scales of race, gender, age-group, and sexual object-choice, and embarked upon an articulation of this newly-perceived location. (A parallel impulse can be traced in John A. T. Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich's controversial *Honest to God* (1963), which argued that the sense of God should be relocated from 'up there', the untouchable, to 'in here', the personal, making prayer an engagement with the world, rather than a withdrawal from it.) In his essay 'Periodizing the Sixties', Fredric Jameson understands this proliferation of voices and diversification of dialects as the emergence of a multiplicity of increasingly legitimate subjects, in opposition to the imperial sectioning of the world's population into 'men', and 'natives' or Others: "The 60s was, then, the period when all these "natives" became human beings, and this internally as well as externally: those inner colonized of the First World – "minorities", marginals, and women – fully as much as its external subjects and official "natives"" (128). For the traditional masculine subject, both the participation in this project of the liberation of the Other and the failure effectively to react against it amount to the same thing – complicity in your own downfall. This chapter seeks to determine how far post-war male novelists before 1971 are willing and radical accomplices in

this dissipation of the self, in recognizing a means of exploring selfhood beyond a consideration of its public and empirical effectiveness, and of maleness beyond its traditional repressive definitions.

‘The personal is political’: despite the proliferation of sexual and political scandals in the mid-60s, the slogan is yet to come to prominence in the era under consideration, but hopefully this anachronism will be excused after a consideration of the importance of this succinct phrase to masculine definitions of self and their repercussions in fictional narrative. Close analysis of the phrase reveals an inherent doublethink already delineated as characteristic of the concept of gender: does it mean that politics is founded upon personal identities and desires, or that personal identities are dictated by their social context? The feminist point, of course, is that private (female) experience should be voiced and validated in a public arena and thereby secure permanent social change. The implications of such a move for that masculine binary, the Public/Private divide, are enormous. Once the personal is political, the binary dissolves, and private becomes public. Hierarchical distinctions dissolve too, and Public can no longer be solely good or solely male. A variety of subject positions – black, gay, and female – become tenable. Though a post-structuralist move would be to embrace this dissolution of binaries, the post-war cultural consensus is different. Rather than granting the subjective and the objective, or the particular and the

universal, equal status, the assumption is that the subjective is now charged positive against the negative status of rationality and objectivity. A predictable patriarchal move has always been to appropriate the positive. In her essay 'Any Theory of the "Subject" Has Always Been Appropriated by the "Masculine"', Luce Irigaray is fatalistic, if lyrical, in the face of such appropriation:

When the Other falls out of the starry sky into the chasms of the psyche, the 'subject' is obviously obliged to stake out new boundaries for his field of implantation and to re-ensure – otherwise, elsewhere – his dominance. Where once he was on the heights, he is now entreated to go down into the depths. These changes in position are still postulated in terms of verticality, of course. Are phallic, therefore. But how to tame these uncharted territories, these dark continents, these worlds through the looking glass? How to master these devilries, these moving phantoms of the unconscious, when a long history has taught you to seek out and desire only clarity, the clear perception of (fixed) ideas? Perhaps this is the time to stress *technique* again? To renounce for the time being the sovereignty of thought in order to forge *tools* which will permit the exploitation of these resources, these unexplored mines. Perhaps for the time being the serene contemplation of empire must be abandoned in favour of taming those forces which, once unleashed, might explode the very concept of empire. A detour into *strategy, tactics, and practice* is called for, at least as long as it takes to gain vision, self-knowledge, self-possession, even in one's decenteredness. (136)

This passage provides a near-perfect epigraph to the concerns of this chapter, weaving together as it does images of the rational male self confronted with the need to explore the dark depths of the unconscious (both darkness and the unconscious being traditionally coded as Other) in order to re-establish a centre of selfhood, and, if not an Empire (the colonies now long lost), then at

least an imperial means of defining that selfhood. Vital to this exploration will be a consideration of the 'strategy, tactics, and practice' employed in male-authored writing, its narratives, heroes, and assumptions regarding the relationship between reader and text. It is a *near*-perfect epigraph in the sense that around Irigaray's study of the category of 'female' hovers the assumption that the category of 'male', culpable of the negative definition and subsequent oppression of the feminine, is negative itself and beyond redemption. Once again, it seems necessary to assert that this movement to appropriate the revelatory, liberatory processes of the decade should be attributed to the *masculine*, not the male. These texts are chosen as representative of genuine attempts to expand and alter male fictional self-definition outwith patriarchal paradigms, albeit to varying degrees. Our experience of the contradictions of the masculine subject, the ways in which these contradictions fissure the fiction in which he appears and asserts himself, and the contradictions of our own experience as readers, dictate that male fiction's negotiation of the new expectations of selfhood will resist simplistic categorisation.

### **It Came From Inner Space**

The gender assumptions of traditional modes of autobiography have become increasingly prominent as feminist literary criticism has developed.

As subject matter for gynocritical studies, autobiography has been invaluable as a means of asserting the political nature of the personal in print. The insertion of the subjective into the traditionally objective register of critical writing (Jane Tompkins's deferred trip to the toilet in 'Me and My Shadow' being perhaps the most controversial example) has proved a powerful tool in the disruption of masculine authority and its designation of the acceptable modes of public expression. The deflationary potential of self-revelation ensures autobiography is an anxious genre in which to display traditional masculine tenets of distance and control. In her essay 'Authorizing the Autobiographical', Shari Benstock unpicks the assumptions behind what she identifies as a masculine style of autobiographical writing:

In definitions of autobiography that stress self-disclosure and narrative account, that posit a self called to witness (as an authority) to 'his' own being, that propose a double referent for the first-person narrative (the present 'I' and the past 'I'), or that conceive of autobiography as 'recapitulation and recall' [...], the Subject is made an Object of investigation (the first-person actually masks the third person) and is further divided between the present moment of the narration and the past on which the narration is focused. These gaps in the temporal and spatial dimensions of the text itself are often successfully hidden from reader and writer, so that the fabric of the narrative appears seamless, spun of whole cloth. The effect is magical – the self appears organic, the present the sum total of the past, the past an accurate predictor of the future. This conception of the autobiographical rests on a firm belief in the *conscious* control of artist over subject matter; this view of the life of history is grounded in authority. It is perhaps not surprising that those who cling to such a definition are those whose assignment under the Symbolic law is to *represent* authority, to represent the phallic power that drives inexorably toward unity, identity, sameness. (1047)



Masculine autobiography, she suggests, seeks to deliver the same level of authority and cognitive privilege to the narrating self (and, by implication, to the reader) as was apparent in our consideration of the first-person dissonant narration of *Scenes From Provincial Life* in Chapter Two. The older, wiser narrator and his peer the reader enjoy a unity of vision that welds together temporal and spatial fragments into aetiological narrative progression and the impression of an essential, organic self.

Such a masculine method of writing autobiographically is conceived of as generating more authority for its author by means of its empirical credentials – the fact that the text is the product of personal experience, of the ‘real’. Benstock lays emphasis upon the unreal, or fictional, nature of this reality and the constant sleight of hand required to maintain it. In ‘writing autobiography’, bell hooks claims that during the eponymous exercise she ‘was compelled to face the fiction that is a part of all retelling, remembering’ (1038). The fictional nature of fiction, autobiographical or otherwise, as we have seen, generates more anxiety than celebration in the work of male authors. In *The Situation of the Novel*, Bernard Bergonzi quotes from a 1967 BBC radio interview with B. S. Johnson, in which the writer claimed: ‘I’m certainly not interested in the slightest in writing fiction. Where the difficulty comes in is that ‘novel’ and ‘fiction’ are not synonymous. Certainly I write autobiography, and I write it in the form of a novel. What I don’t

write is fiction' (207). Apparently conscious of its lowly artistic status, Johnson seeks to resurrect autobiography precisely by distinguishing it from 'fiction', the artificial, contrived processes expounded by Benstock. In claiming the novel as an autobiographical non-fictional form, Johnson makes a bold claim for a direct (empirical) link between text and selfhood. The reliably experimental nature of his narrative form makes Johnson's work a crucial case-study.

B. S. Johnson's intention to renegotiate the status of autobiography within the novel form, and the form of the novel itself, is apparent from his first publication, *Albert Angelo* (1964). The novel's claim to speak from any coherent source of authority is faltering by the end of its epigraph, a quotation from Samuel Beckett's beleaguered monologue *The Unnamable*, a text which foregrounds its fictionality and unreliability at every opportunity. The 'Prologue' begins as a script with a cast of three characters, 'Joseph', 'Luke' and 'Albert', then continues into a description of Albert's residence written in the third-person. The 'Exposition' section, narrated in the first-person, then immediately disrupts the rational authority of that narration with its tone of mild disinterest in traditional autobiographical factual data:

I think I shall visit my parents every Saturday, as a rule, as a habit. Occasionally Sundays: instead, though, not as well. But usually Saturdays, as a rule, as a habit almost. Yes.

I think that they are my parents, at least, yes. (19)

Shifting pronouns, alterations in typographical layout, a hole cut in page 149 that gives the reader a preview of a disturbing death on page 153; all these ensure the text can never allow a vision of a whole self, fictional or autobiographical, but worries constantly at the eye and the I. This tactic of altering pronouns (though not typography) is familiar from Fowles's *Daniel Martin*, which for all its gestures towards surrendering narrative authority, remains a traditional *bildungsroman*, based upon masculine tenets of self and fictional narrative. The most striking, and infamous, attempt to denounce fiction comes later in Johnson's novel, with the interjection: '– OH, FUCK ALL THIS LYING! [...] – fuck all this lying look what im really trying to write about is writing not all this stuff about architecture trying to say something about writing about my writing' (163-67). This is an explicit denouncement of the 'fictional' for the 'autobiographical', which, it is implied, is more 'real', and more of a risk. It is telling that this risky, vehement and capitalised outburst is followed by a ranting exposition of authorial intention, which, paradoxically, aims to re-establish in far more certain terms the presence of a unifying controlling identity both within and without the text: '– Im trying to say something not tell a story telling stories is telling lies and I want to tell the truth about me about my experience about my truth about my truth to reality' (167). The 'i' has quickly become capitalized, and the rules of written grammar are reinstated just after this passage. It is telling, too, that the

breakdown in any semblance of fictional character-identity comes immediately after that section of the novel which testifies most convincingly to the pain of the hero's self exposure. Pain at this level, it seems, merits making personal and can then be claimed as a means of legitimization, as a badge of bravery. In his position as supply teacher at a turbulent inner-London school, Albert decides to try and purge the mounting student resentment at his term's teaching by allowing his class to 'write down exactly what they feel about me, with a guarantee that there will be no complaints or recriminations from me, whatever they say' (149)<sup>1</sup>. The students' detached, vicious, semi-literate accounts undermine Albert's fictive attempts at subjective truth to such an extent that his character is usurped by the authorial (autobiographical) voice in the immediate aftermath. Remembering the start of a love affair, Albert has been described as Jenny's 'equal, right for her, big, hard, everything physically about him was big and hard' (48). There is barely a student essay which fails to contain a physical description of the teacher as some variation on 'big fat over fed fool' (159) or 'fat, porky selfish drip' (161). Descriptions of Albert's teaching experience, in both the third- and first-person, have represented him restraining himself at

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<sup>1</sup> It is tempting, too, to fuel this suspicion of a personal claim upon pain with the fact that, as Jonathan Coe, Johnson's biographer, revealed to Philip Tew, Johnson himself, driven to supply-teaching for economic reasons, commissioned and collected the essays appearing in the novel from his own pupils (*B.S. Johnson*, note, 35).

the brink of violence, yet most of the children make reference to the fact that he hits the boys repeatedly around their heads. Albert is revealed as a liar immediately prior to being 'revealed' (and denounced by the narrator) as fictional. Any cognitive privilege granted to the reader so far is thereby revealed to be a sham. This sense of a swindle, coupled with the reader's distress at Albert's masochism in inviting this student assessment, makes the interjection of 'OH, FUCK' at the end of the 'Development' section easy to read as a heroic rescue, both of Albert and the reader. The reader is thankful to leave the masochistic and helpless Albert for the authority of a 'real' person telling the truth, surreptitiously enforcing the impression that autobiography is in opposition to fiction, and superior to it, by virtue of its direct linguistic communication between author and reader. Autobiography, it is implied, functions to announce and impose the identity of its author rather than constructing it.

Albert's authority has been severely compromised even before he is denounced by the autobiographical narrator. He keeps his teaching temporary in the belief that his true profession, referred to variously as 'real work, my work, real work, vocation' (103), and 'this essential myself, my identity, my character' (115), is architecture. Apart from the fact that he does not work as an architect, Albert is content to admit this 'vocation' is still more immaterial, in that its:

real satisfaction, even with success, whatever that means, would be in the work itself, as it is now, the real satisfaction, in the work. When I've done something, hewn it from my mind, then when it's actually built does not seem to matter, really, it's an accident, a commercial or economic accident, quite beyond my control. (103)

The confession in 'Disintegration' that 'what im really trying to write about is writing not all this stuff about architecture' (167) prompts interrogation of the selection of architecture as Albert's non-profession for the unsuccessful analogy. Architecture, in its requirement for practical limitations upon artistic design, might be considered a compromised art-form. Johnson's probing of the limits of truth amidst traditional narrative techniques foregrounds writing as similarly, and necessarily, compromised. Albert's hangdog acceptance of the impossibility ever of converting his scribbles into concrete parallels fiction's failure to make firm claims upon reality. Albert's buildings are never built, his supply teaching by definition fragmented, and any semblance of a fictional narrative is ultimately untenable.

In his 2002 article 'B. S. Johnson' in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Philip Tew notes of *Albert Angelo's* setting that 'London is narrowed to the mundane consciousness of various inter-subjectivities rather than any grand narrative' (24). His nomination of subjective consciousness as 'mundane', though clearly intended in part to chime with the 'grand' of 'grand narrative', hints at a recurrent supposition noted above, that subjectivity lies on the negative pole of an opposition with the objective: the very supposition



Johnson himself opposes. Tew goes on to argue that, though Johnson's novels, when they are considered critically at all, are considered from a textual viewpoint, their *context* too, should be accounted for: 'Johnson's novels balance the personal reflection with a sociological account of urban living' (26). *Albert Angelo* generates a powerful proportion of its sense of alterity from the wanderings of its hero ('what a useless appellation', *Albert*, 167) in the dives of a post-colonial, post-war capital city. Albert attempts to bring out his silent Greek Cypriot students with his vague recollection of classical Greek, and the culinary tastes he shares with his friend Terry are not in the least mundane: 'There must be cafés for ten or a dozen nationalities – Maltese, West Indians, Somalis, West Africans, Turkish and Greek Cypriots, and so on – and we usually go in a West Indian or a Somali one' (51). Tew concludes that 'Johnson [...] seems acutely attuned to recognizing and critiquing the power and hegemony of the imperial/colonial narrative and its collapse in the postwar world, rather than its narrativization' (27). In its maintenance of hierarchies and marked refusal to let the subaltern speak, of course, the imperial/colonial narrative functions in the same way as the masculine narrative. In his exploration of issues of authority in autobiographical writing, Johnson is inevitably involved in deconstructing the gender implications of confessing the self.

Yet just as an examination of the work of John Fowles revealed that a feminist sensibility need not necessarily undermine a masculine narrative, so Johnson's novels may be used to demonstrate that the deconstruction of a masculine narrative need not prompt an empathy with the aims of feminism. Johnson's 1969 'book in a box' *The Unfortunates* represents a professed attempt to keep a promise to Tony Tillinghast, dead from cancer aged 29, to 'get it all down, mate' ('So he came to his parents at Brighton'<sup>1</sup>, 5). Despite its innovation as a literary object, the novel seems immediately less experimental than *Albert Angelo* in its uninterrupted adherence to a mode of autobiographical confession. In his introduction to Picador's 1999 reprint of the novel, Jonathan Coe demonstrates the affinity noted by Tew towards a view of Johnson's work as valuable for its subjective, rather than contextual, revelations:

*The Unfortunates* offers thin pickings as a social document. Johnson was a highly politicized writer in the sense that he was very active in a number of writers' and filmmakers' unions, but the novels themselves are for the most part apolitical, gravitating instead towards the personal and the interior. (ix)

This affinity was in fact encouraged by Johnson himself, who claimed in interview, 'Outside writing I'm a very political animal' (88). Such a claim is

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<sup>1</sup> *The Unfortunates*, though unbound, is divided into twenty-seven sections, all unnamed apart from the 'FIRST' and 'LAST'. Following Tew, the sections from which quotations have been taken are identified by their initial phrases.

immediately denounced by a gynocritical consideration of the glaring absence of women in the text, who, as the Women's Liberation Movement accelerated during the time of the book's writing, appear only to serve tea to those participating in the pivotal male bond, or to fail to reach orgasm despite the narrator's best, bemused attempts. More interesting for this discussion, though, is the further light Coe's comment throws upon the received relationship between the political and the personal. Like the narrator, who claims to be 'not really interested in motives, actions are what are important' ('Then he was doing research', 5), Coe persists in limiting the definition of 'politics' to a public display of action, refusing to acknowledge the power relationships at work within the interior of any person, or any text. His assumption here, albeit astonishing in the context of 1999, is that the personal is apolitical, or at least private.

The exact tone of the first-person narration of *The Unfortunates* is initially difficult to determine. Here, the narrator is speaking of his friend Tony:

That vacation, I remember he told us at tea, or in a letter, which was it, both probably, that he had been selling rugs door-to-door down workingclass streets in this city, yes, which later came in very useful, the knowledge, to him, when there were race-riots in the city, he was interviewed by reporters, or something, I don't remember, why should I, it doesn't matter, nothing does, it's all chaos, look at his death, why?        Why not? ('His dog, or his parents' dog', 2-3)

Dorrit Cohn's categorisation of narrative voice in *Transparent Minds* includes the 'autonomous monologue' (217), defined as that mode of narration in which the figural voice of the speaking 'I' totally obliterates the authorial narrative voice. *Ulysses*'s 'Penelope' is commonly upheld as the ultimate example. The proliferation of its yeses makes it tempting to classify *The Unfortunates* narrative mode in the same way. However, a comparison of Molly's 'yes', accumulating more positive charge with every repetition, makes Johnson's seem negative in comparison, followed as it is here by a breakdown in recall and a cancellation of its charge. In *The Unfortunates*, 'yes' means 'momentarily, I'm asserting that I've remembered something correctly'. It is a 'yes' to celebrate recall and its record on paper as successful. It marks the recognition, and recording of truth. This success however, is fleeting. In *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*, R. D. Laing, in one of his tellingly-gendered explicatory scenarios, examines the ordinary ways in which a speaker's authority over their material can be undermined. In the example, Jill keeps returning to a subject which Jack wants to forget:

Jack may act upon Jill in many ways. He may make her feel guilty for keeping on 'bringing it up'. He may *invalidate* her experience. This can be done more or less radically. He can indicate merely that it is unimportant or trivial, whereas it is important and significant to her. Going further, he can shift the *modality* of her experience from memory to imagination: 'It's all in your imagination.' Further still, he can invalidate the *content*. 'It never happened that way.' Finally, he can invalidate not only the significance, modality and content, but her

very capacity to remember at all, and make her feel guilty for doing so into the bargain.

This is not unusual. People are doing such things to each other all the time. (31)

The male narrative voice of *The Unfortunates* turns all the weapons listed by Laing – guilt, invalidation, a shift of modality, and a rejection of the reliability of memory – upon itself.

Yet, as a textual male confession, *The Unfortunates* is not without defences against such weapons. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, much feminist critical writing has made striking use of autobiography as ‘shock-tactic’ in exploding the myth of authorial objectivity. In *The Inward Gaze*, Peter Middleton, considering the autobiographical nature of much writing in the still-forming field of masculinity studies, notices the presence of a confessional narrative in much of the work. In contrast to its original purpose in female critical writing, in which it is intended precisely to undermine patriarchal standards of objectivity, he claims that ‘this imposes on the story a subsequent, more informed, more worked-out viewpoint. Indeed the more self-critical the tone of such writing, paradoxically the more virtuous the writer will appear’ (21). In *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*, Michel Foucault recognises a recent ‘metamorphosis in literature’ with regard to the confessional mode:

We have passed from a pleasure to be recounted and heard, centering on the heroic or marvelous (sic) narration of ‘trials’ of bravery or



sainthood, to a literature ordered according to the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of the confession holds out like a shimmering mirage. (59)

The ideal reader of male-authored confessional texts, or rather male-narrated ones, however, retains to the present day an appreciation of the chivalric heroism of truth-telling. Dorrit Cohn makes reference to 'the confessional increment' (15) of first-person narration, both autobiographical and fictional, and in 'The Masculine Mode', Peter Schwenger, anxious to defend confessional writing against any charge of passivity, contests that 'to write about certain aspects of one's life is to change that life. The writing becomes not a passive reflection but an act in itself, full of risk and consequence' (106). Expectation of this 'confessional increment' to the inflation of narratorial heroism is demonstrated in *The Unfortunates* at the confrontation with Tony's weight-loss: 'this diminution made features stand out more, which were not that noticeable before, his eyes stood out, stared, fixed you, I slip into the second person, in defence, stared for longer moments than you wanted, than I did want, yes' ('So he came to his parents at Brighton', 2). The second-person, like the third-, is figured as refuge from the demands of the first-. The increment stems from a traditional masculine apprehension of the personal as a risk. In female-authored texts – for example, *The L-Shaped Room*, and even *The Golden Notebook* – women's confessions of weakness and



confusion are ritualized, habitualized, naturalized and relatively ordinary.

Male confession, and the voice of *The Unfortunates*, is posited as

extraordinary. The familiar artifice of the stream-of-consciousness mode and

the constant reminders of the narrator's authorial presence ensure that the

narrative of *The Unfortunates* is better included under Cohn's category of

'memory narrative', an a-chronological form organised by memory as a

narrative principle (182), and that (as in *Albert Angelo*) its authorial voice as

well as its figural one is calling for a confessional increment. Narration as

expiation – guilt is measured out to match the expected amount of

forgiveness, as here, when Tony's cancer is advancing:

That it was serious, the first thing that brought it home to me, was that he was too ill to come down to London for the publication party of my novel, in my flat, the novel which was so much better for his work on it, for his attention to it. It was dedicated to them! This shocked me, I was annoyed, angry even, that he, that both of them, should find any excuse whatsoever for missing something so important, that its importance to me should not be shared by them, it made me think almost that he was backing out of his support for the book, my paranoia again, yes. ('Just as it seemed things were going his way', 4)

Albert's pedagogical tactic is brought to mind – he assumes that his students'

resentment will be overtaken by admiration at the risk he is taking in

allowing them to write what they think about him. Self-flagellation fails to

pay off for Albert, because the children, being childish, fail to understand the

dividends he should be paid for his risk. The narrator of *The Unfortunates*

confesses to an adult-only Sixties audience, educated to admire attempts at

personal analysis. If the reader is moved by his confession, it is on the basis of a number of assumptions about the 'risk and consequence' of that confession, and these assumptions depend in turn upon a gendered concept of subjectivity. In other words, if consequentially the reader grants Johnson and his narrator heroism for getting personal, s/he does so *because* they are both men and the personal is understood as Other to them. If confession assumes this concession, if it pleads its special case, then its risks are greatly diminished.

Suspicion is rising over the integrity of the confessional risk. Can a narrative fraught with masculine assumptions escape them with a genuine plea for the personal? Or does such a narrative inescapably plead instead for the recognition of a failing universality? Is a reader experiencing empathy for the narrator's loss of his friend inevitably committed via that empathy to a host of insidious, gendered, epistemological hierarchies? The reader-response work of Stanley Fish can be, and has been, criticised for its failure to address the gender of the readers in the interpretive communities it posits<sup>1</sup>. It is precisely due to this gender-blindness that one of Fish's key points is useful here. Defending his focus upon the reader against accusations of relativism, Fish asserts that 'while relativism is a position one can entertain, it

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Jacobus, for example, in *Reading Woman*, claims that Fish ignores gender as a constitutive element in the interpretive communities he posits, as well as, in the essay 'Is There a Text in This Class?', in his crucial opening 'anec-joke' (83).

is not a position one can occupy' (319). Everyone is always already situated *somewhere*, he goes on to argue, and 'an individual's assumptions and opinions are not "his own" in any sense that would give body to the fear of solipsism' (320). Subjectivity and solipsism, relativism and chaos – the personal is still to be feared here, but that fear can be quelled by a sense of (an interpretive) community. Johnson's mode of narration in *The Unfortunates* may be seen as subject to the same assumptions of communal mores and values, and these values, and this community, are frequently masculine ones. In such a professedly 'personal' novel, the narrator refers repeatedly not to *his* mind, but instead to the fact that 'the mind is confused, was it this visit, or another, the mind has telescoped time here ('Again the house at the end of a bus-route', 5). The factual and temporal vagaries of memory are here marked, then, not as personal failure, but as a universal trait. The narrator speaks highly of Tony's skill in suggesting revisions of the manuscripts of his novels, believing that Tony's comments gave his work 'some sort of objective, or at least collective-subjective, value' (1). 'Collective-subjective' – the phrase nicely maintains a sense of the independent choice of a single agent happily coinciding with that of other single agents and resonates with Fish's notion of the 'interpretive community'. Tew, in his determined attempt to reclaim Johnson's work for realism in *B. S. Johnson*, preserves Fish's gender-blindness with regard to this communal recognition:

'He appeals to a wider context of socially understood factors and dimensions of power that dominate even the most simplistic account of the nature of the real and encountered relations in the world' (52). What is difficult, however, is to distinguish between this collective-subjective and the 'objective' (itself a collective, and masculine, agreement upon how to perceive) Johnson rejects as untenable.

A 'collective-subjective' perspective has further claims towards the traditional stability of the objective, universal viewpoint. Previous chapters have emphasized a theoretical dissonance between traditional linear narratives and the competing concepts of the essentialist or existentialist self. A pre-existent, essential self, it was argued, should not need to rely upon narrative development as a demonstration of existence. An existential self, mindful of contingency, should exist in antithesis to linear plot progression. Thus it might be argued that a fragmented narrative is a more 'realistic' demonstration of self in an increasingly heterogeneous, divisive environment. Ronald Hayman makes such an argument in *The Novel Today 1967-1975*: 'Far from being antithetical to realism in the novel, formal invention is indispensable to it. If the novelist carries his realism far enough, he finds that the formal relationship he has set up between the component parts of his fiction is making a statement about external reality' (5-6). Fragmented form is apprehended as a statement of the form of contemporary experience,

which is contrasted with a lost or utopian existence of unity and wholeness.

In other words, narrative, even when fragmented to the point of anti-

narrative, is always understood structurally. This structure always

incorporates the pervading values of the dominant epistemology. In her

queering of narratology, *Come as You Are: Sexuality and Narrative*, Judith Roof

makes just this assertion in relation to post-modern fiction:

Although various metanarratives of knowledge, according to Lyotard, might be disrupted, the structuralist character of narrative with its adherent binarisms and presumed productivity still holds sway not only as a comforting relic of more certain times but also as a thriving defence against poststructuralist skepticism, systemic failures, and grandiose multiplicity. (32)

Though *The Unfortunates* expounds and demonstrates the elastic temporality

and mutable reliability of memory through its unbound structure, its

narrative limits are set by the sections marked 'FIRST' and 'LAST', and those

limits are in turn set by those of a (male) human life. Empathy for the gaps

that cancer has forced in Tony's speech (his saliva glands destroyed by

chemotherapy, he has to sip continually from a glass of water) and in his

reading (the illness 'deprived him of his ability to read', 'Just as it seemed', 7)

is expressed in the text by failing sentence structures and textual gaps. The

physical form of the book itself provides a tangible metaphor, not just for the

contingency of human memory, but also for the contingency of human

suffering, and cancer itself. Yet here it is Tony who dies, not the Author, in



spite of Roland Barthes's death knoll, published the year before the novel.

Tony's illness may silence him, but it paradoxically prompts the narrator to seek and attempt meaning and a meaningful means of elegy:

That this thing could just come from nowhere, from inside himself, of his very self, to attack him, to put his self in danger, I still do not understand. Perhaps there is nothing to be understood, perhaps understanding is simply not to be found, is not applicable to such a thing. But it is hard, hard, not to try to understand, even for me, who accept that all is nothing, that sense does not exist.  
(*'For recuperation'*, 2)

The meaninglessness of cancer is interpreted as a challenge, not a conclusion, and its oncological absolute prompts a quest by the narrator for an ontological one. Just as the novel itself is bound by the nomination of its first and last sections, so its fragmented interior text preserves the sanctity of narrative progression. The narrator notes at one point of Tony that:

He had successfully kept from [his parents] what it was, until then, though they knew it was very serious, but not that serious, he had kept it from them, what nature of deception is that, I wonder, what are the morals of that? I should try to work that out some time, I should try to understand. (*'So he came to his parents at Brighton'*, 1)

The responsibility of placing some sort of narrative of morality, an aetiology, upon the contingency of cancer, preys upon the narrator, and 'the mind' still seeks for chains of logic stretching back into the past. The narrator professes a hatred for the sub-editors that hack all the lyrical touches from his football match-report: his stint as a football journalist is described by Nicolas Tredell



in 'Telling Life, Telling Death: *The Unfortunates*' as an "'anti-portrait" of the artist' (36). Linguistic parsimony, however, is exactly what he admires in Tony's editing of his novels: 'it was good to have him to bounce ideas off, to learn from, to have him pull me up when I committed wild excesses, made a fool of myself, in my work' ('Then he was doing research', 4). In her 1984 article 'The Trojan Horse', Monique Wittig upheld that 'one must assume both a particular *and* a universal point of view, at least to be part of literature' (68). The Sixties masculine mindset still held these two terms to be mutually exclusive, linking them with another lingering polarization: that of Reason and Emotion. In this professedly subjective novel, rational progression is still upheld to be the ultimate, if elusive, goal. This perceivedly paradoxical commitment to the personal and the public, the subjective and the objective, is nicely summed up in the novel's conclusion:

The difficulty is to understand without generalization, to see each piece of received truth, or generalization, as true only if it is true for me, solipsism again, I come back to it again, and for no other reason.

In general, generalization is to lie, to tell lies.

Not how he died, not what he died of, even less why he died, are of concern, to me, only the fact that he did die, he is dead, is important: the loss to me, to us  
(LAST, 6)

Paramount here, of course, is empathy for and duty to Tony, and a value placed upon knowledge stemming from interpersonal relationships which denies the binary of Self and Others. Yet, 'in general, generalization is to lie, to tell lies': the contradiction inherent in a generalising statement that refutes the possibility of generalisation provides a fitting epitaph to a narrative that attempts to valorise subjectivity by constructing an objective framework for its valorisation.

### **In Sickness, Not in Health**

It is appropriate, perhaps, that the text of *The Unfortunates* is haunted by cancer and its contingent nature, for in a masculine epistemology, the subjective always carries with it intimations of femininity, and thus negativity, and so illness. 'The root of sanity is in the balls', claims Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (227), making mental health a male preserve. Within this epistemology, Johnson's attempt to redefine the relationship between subjective and objective, solipsism and generalization, is similarly sick. Third-person narration, too, is not immune. For the masculine mindset, there is a danger of infection during any foray into the personal. Dorrit Cohn traces the emergence of Free Indirect Discourse, or what she calls 'narrated monologue' (99), to a specific moment in the development of the novel, that

is, the point at which third-person narration entered the domain previously reserved for first-person texts of epistolary or confessional fiction. The mode had Jane Austen as one of its first pioneers, of course, and this tarnishing with femininity further explains the effort of the FID texts considered in Chapter Two both to immasculate their readers and to exhibit the masculine credentials of their heroes.

One of the tools of textual immasculature, as we have seen, is a linear narrative, driving the reader to accept a host of implicit assumptions in her or his anticipation of utopia. A coherent narrative is vital to masculine health. Peter Brooks, in his essay 'Changes in the Margins: Construction, Transference, and Narrative', notes that modern psychoanalysis is now recognized to be 'a narrative discipline' (47), and that patients are defined, rather than those without balls, as people with incoherent personal narrative discourses:

*Mens sana in fabula sana*: mental health is a coherent life story, neurosis is a faulty narrative. [...] The narrative chain, with each event connected to the next by reasoned causal links, marks the victory of reason over chaos, of society over the aberrancy of crime, and restitutes a world in which aetiological histories offer the best solution to the apparently unexplainable. (49)

The 'aetiological history', as we have seen, is coded masculine in its logical progression, as against the fragmentation and confusion of feminine irrationality. Causal narrative, like the patriarchy, is couched as 'natural'.

Such an assumption, however, was undermined during the Sixties by the pervasive influence of the new (anti-) psychiatry, which preached precisely that mental health (and by implication, healthy narrative) was *not* a given or a natural state, but rather an artificial and precarious construction. In his 1960 book *The Divided Self*, R. D. Laing developed the idea of insanity as an intelligible, even sane, response to the dissipated demands of contemporary society. In *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* (1967), he remarked upon the pervasive cultural tendency, noted above, to regard the contemplation of the private self as disreputable, and even diseased: 'We are socially conditioned to regard total immersion in outer space and time as normal and healthy. Immersion in inner space and time tends to be regarded as anti-social withdrawal, a deviancy, invalid, pathological *per se*, in some sense discreditable' (103). As R. W. Connell notes in his essay 'Psychoanalysis and Masculinity', Laing never developed the clues his own work offered to a radical analysis of gender. Rather, *The Divided Self*, for example, continually utilizes resolutely male metaphors to describe the ontological insecurity in predominantly female case studies: 'We may approach this rather difficult psychotic material by comparing the fear of loss of the 'self' to a more familiar neurotic anxiety that may lie behind a complaint of impotence' (149). Pathological selfhood (schizophrenia) is described like a pathological case of masculinity; it shows all the symptoms

(the mind/body split, fear of engulfing relationships, pathological attempts at self-sufficiency, use of fantasy and stereotypes in the contemplation of others, repulsion/narcissistic attraction of homosexuality, depersonalization, creation of false-self system, etc) diagnosed by this thesis so far.

Laing's theory of madness as intelligible and even intelligent under contemporary conditions offers a potentially disruptive challenge to the traditional paradigm of healthy self = healthy narrative, not least because madness is always coded as feminine. David Storey's 1963 novel *Radcliffe* provides an interesting demonstration of these competing value systems. If, as we have seen, masculinity couches and values the reading process as a rational, hermeneutic exercise, then it is a radical step by a male author to make both the fictional male self, and the narrative in which it appears, ambiguous. Though the novel's form as a realist narrative may initially suggest that it sits uncomfortably with the selection criteria of the novels in this chapter, dependent as they are upon formal innovation, its dissolution of that genre from within will be used to justify its inclusion. In *David Storey*, John Russell Taylor assesses the novel as follows:

A powerful, disturbing book – many would say his most powerful and disturbing – but a lot of its power comes from the sense we have of not quite grasping what it is about and our feeling that the author does not either: that it represents an almost uncontrollable boiling up of violent emotions which are shaped and forged – but only just – on the anvil of art. (20)

As well as a profoundly Romantic vision of the artist, this assessment may be attributed to a weird atmosphere in *Radcliffe* that all modes of perception are breaking down, with a constant fog hanging over the landscape, the darkness of the shuttered rooms in the Place, Leonard's home, and his own fluctuating levels of deafness. This failure of rational perception is not only visual and aural, but mental too: it is frequently impossible to deduce what someone in the novel is thinking or meaning, and the text is peppered with retractions and obfuscations:

Tolson stood gazing in at the barren interior with *a kind of stifled curiosity, half-embarrassed*. He *seemed neither to hear nor to see* John who, *as though* recognising *some sort of* threat in Tolson's attitude, had suddenly leaned against the wall in a *vague gesture* of appeal. (236)  
(my emphasis)

Apparently unconnected facts are placed together in the same paragraph, and the reader struggles to connect them but frequently fails:

It was into this void that the Place had seemed to fit. It was as if the building itself represented a complete abdication; and to the extent that [John Radcliffe] struggled now to preserve and secure it from outside interference. During this period, now almost a year since his arrival, he had begun to see an increasing amount of his brother. (24)

Cognitive privilege is constantly proffered, then snatched away from the reader. Here, Leonard and Victor Tolson are camping on the Show Ground, and we are momentarily inside Leonard's mind:

Moonlight filtered through the canvas above his head. The lamp had gone out. Tolson was kneeling beside him, stooped forward and apparently gazing at his body moulded in the thick texture of the



blankets. Leonard closed his eyes. He lay perfectly still. It seemed only a few seconds, yet when he looked again he saw that Tolson was in fact lying in his bed on the other side of the bike. (61)

The description juxtaposes an 'apparent' occurrence with a factual situation, but the fact that Tolson is first located close to Leonard, and only then designated 'in fact' to be on the other side of the tent, ensures Leonard's hallucination takes preference over the report of his empirical observation. Two pages later, we are outside the tent and Leonard's mind is once again utterly opaque: 'He lifted the hammer and swung it down on a boulder. He glanced up once more at the tent. He brought the hammer down again, more fiercely' (63). Cognitive access, it seems, is granted only when the deductions possible from it are obscure, that is, when Leonard is confused, fantasizing, or merely mistaken.

Perception in the novel, and subsequently the process of interpretation of that novel, is unwell. The reasons for this sickness are numerous, but all involve a dissolution of hierarchical (and profoundly masculine) value-sets. The class system is one of these: through its consideration of the degenerating squirearchy of the Radcliffes, the novel (like Fowles's *The Collector*) explores the subjective consequences of class transition. Aristocratic property, once a symbol of affluence and security, is now a debilitating, draining responsibility: the Place, hunched upon its hilltop, is rocked by the train services in the tunnels beneath it, and glared at by the

council housing that has encroached upon every acre of the valley. Of the trinity of men at the centre of the novel, Leonard Radcliffe represents this compromised aristocracy, Tolson, the physical working-class, and Blakeley functions as a bridging figure between the rarefied environment of Leonard's home and Tolson's estate – he is a self-educated man living in a council flat. This tripartite relationship (already the number of people involved is in excess of the sacred binary) is disruptive of other hierarchies too. In his book *All Bull: The National Servicemen*, B. S. Johnson quotes Jeff Nuttall on the military concept of 'over-identification', which he defines as 'army jargon for not sticking to your rank socially, for being too friendly with the lads' (24). Leonard would be 'over-identifying' with Tolson merely through associating with a working-class man, but his identification goes further: he is in love.

Homosexuality is at the centre of the 'sickness' degenerating the novel's narrative and interpretive processes. Though *Radcliffe* may initially seem laudable for its determined foregrounding of a homosexual relationship in an era of continuing censorship<sup>1</sup>, and its obfuscation of interpretation may in part be attributed to the threat of that censorship, it is impossible not to see the novel's plot and fictional technique reflected in Judith Roof's diagnosis of homosexuality's negative narrative connotations:

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<sup>1</sup> Though the Government-commissioned Wolfenden Committee's report proposing the decriminalization of homosexual acts between consenting adult men was published in 1957, it was not until the 1967 Sexual Offences Act that this was passed into law.

The bourgeois need for the correct narrative, one effected by proper heterosexual, reproductive sexuality, and good timing, positions sexuality as itself causal: perverted sexuality is the cause of the bad narrative, familial disfunction, low production; and good, reproductive sexuality is the cause of profit, continuity, and increase. (35)

The heterosexually-perceived narcissism of homosexual love disrupts the primacy of binary thinking and prevents Othering, as well as wrecking the structure of the patriarchal family and the placement of that family within a hierarchy of class. This judgement is borne out by *Radcliffe's* plot, which is one of warped reproductive processes: Tolson's father is absent, and he has a much older wife; Kathleen has three children by her own father Blakeley; and Elizabeth, Leonard's sister, gives birth to Tolson's illegitimate son. In focusing on a homosexual love affair, Storey has committed himself to competing and paradoxical demands upon the text he will publish, for as Judith Butler notes in *Gender Trouble*: 'for heterosexuality to remain intact as a distinct social form, it *requires* an intelligible conception of homosexuality and also requires the prohibition of that conception in rendering it culturally unintelligible' (77). Heterosexuality depends for its ultimate coherence upon the clear delineation of the 'bad' example of homosexuality, at the same time that its social organisation requires the obfuscation and concealment of that bad example. Homosexuality is still more threatening in that attempts at its definition involve an unrationalized coexistence of pre-existing, competing explanations. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes

how:

Foucault among other historians locates in about the nineteenth century a shift in European thought from viewing same-sex sexuality as a matter of prohibited and isolated genital *acts* (acts to which, in that view, anyone might be liable who did not have their appetites in general under close control) to viewing it as a function of stable definitions of *identity* (so that one's personality structure might mark one as a *homosexual*, even, perhaps, in the absence of any genital activity at all). (82-83)

*Radcliffe's* dissonance as a narrative structure may in part be attributed to its inclusion in the central triptych of its characters of both of these competing methods of understanding. It can be noted how these tropes mirror the now-familiar split between the masculine paradigms of selfhood: the existentialist and the essentialist. Tolson can be nominated 'homosexual' within one patriarchal psychoanalytic discourse in that he chooses to participate in sexual acts with other men. Choosing to act is, of course, masculine. Blakeley is marked a number of times during the novel as feminine, as when Leonard 'saw Blakeley's face close to his and the anxious, vaguely feminine look, inquisitive and almost sensitive' (152). Blakeley, evidenced not only by his homosexual desire for Tolson, but also his incestuous relationship with his daughter, is unethical, illogical, and thus feminine in his desires. Male homosexuality as a feminized identity is, of course, a familiar misapprehension, but here this is complicated by the simultaneous demonstration of Tolson's sexuality as a series of willed acts

perpetrated by a man with all the attributes of primal manhood. Tolson's physicality is emphatically *not* feminine, characterized as it is by acts (digging, lifting, hammering) rather than innate facticity.

Leonard's case is still more complex and contradictory. In *The Divided Self*, R. D. Laing quotes approvingly from a 1949 case-study by Boss:

When his progressing schizophrenia 'depleted his masculinity', when most of his own male feelings 'had run out', he suddenly and for the first time in his life felt driven to 'open himself' to a certain form of homosexual love. He described most vividly how in this homosexual love he succeeded in experiencing at least half of the fullness of existence. He did not have to 'exert' himself very much to attain this semi-fullness, there was little danger of 'losing himself' and of 'running out' into boundlessness in this limited extent and depth. On the contrary, the homosexual love could 'replenish' his existence 'to a whole man'. [...] We, however, see in both phenomena, in this sort of homosexuality and in the persecution ideas, nothing but two parallel forms of expression of the same schizophrenic shrinkage and destruction of human existence, namely two different attempts at regaining the lost parts of one's personality. (146-47)

Homosexuality is an attempt (albeit misguided) at self-completion in a society in which depletion is endemic. Julian Mitchell's 1963 novel *As Far As You Can Go* contains an unstable American youth, Eddie Jackson, who demands of the hero: 'You know why there are so many queers about these days? Because the race is beginning to get the idea. If we were all cut in half, way back there at the beginning, we've got to be looking for somebody of the same sex, right?' (226). Leonard Radcliffe holds a theory which, though less flippant, similarly attempts to take authority from antiquity. At Leonard's



trial for the murder of Tolson, it is a shock to read, after a number of vague but fevered descriptions of the two men's love-making, that the Prosecution's report states 'there was no physical evidence of homosexual practices' (344). This rational, simplistic rebuttal to a complex and passionate emotional and physical reality would seem to confirm Laing's stated need for a revolt against the depersonalizing rhetoric of the establishment and psychiatry in particular. Yet Leonard, like Eddie Jackson, and Boss in the case-study of homosexual tendencies above, is himself determined to understand homosexual desire as symptomatic of a universal psychosis rather than an emotional and physical need. This atmosphere of rational depersonalization is increased in the narration of the courtroom scene by its determined denial of cognitive privilege over Leonard's subjectivity in favour of journalistic reportage:

Then later, when he was trying to describe the relationship that had existed between Tolson and himself, he said, almost in tears, 'The battle was so intense between us because we could see something beyond it. It was the split between us that tormented us; the split in the whole of Western society.'

When it was suggested that he was trying to obscure something which was intensely personal and distasteful to him by giving it an air of objectivity, by disguising it in terms of some general theory, he stated vehemently, 'You've got to *accept* that there is a love that exists between men which is neither obscene nor degrading, but is as powerful and as profound, and as fruitful, as that love which bears children. The love that men have for other men, as *men*, may be beyond some people's powers of comprehension. But it has a subtlety and a flexibility, a power that creates order. Politics, art, religion: these things are the products of men's loving. And by that I mean their hatred, their antagonism, their affection,



as *men*, and their curiosity in one another as men. It isn't that women have been deprived of these things, but simply that they can't love *in this way*. They have been given something less abstract, more physical, something more easily understood. Law, art, politics, religion: these are the creation of men as *men*'. (345)

Leonard's love for Tolson, he asserts, was an intelligible attempt to blend his intellectuality, his rationality, with Tolson's primal purity of physical awareness, and thus reunite his divided self. In their attempt to make the concept of homosexuality culturally intelligible, both Leonard and Storey subjugate the concept to the binary hierarchisms of the dominant epistemology. Despite his efforts, Leonard's justification of instinctive love rings insincere in its attempts to intellectualize physical desire and sexual object-choice. Homosexuality may here have been dignified from a physical disease to a universal symptom, but it is still redolent with madness and sickness, and the novel's confusing and obfuscatory descriptive practices are symptomatic of this. Homosexuality, in its disruption of binary definitions, has wrecked narrative realism and corrupted the masculine text.

## **Drugs 'n' Sex (without Rock 'n' Roll)**

### **Drugs**

If you get sick, then take drugs: Alexander Trocchi's 1963 novel *Cain's Book* attempts to disrupt narrative progression further, under the influence of heroin. In her essay 'Addiction and the Avant-Garde: Heroin Addiction and

Narrative in Alexander Trocchi's *Cain's Book*, Sue Wiseman refers to the novel's 'heroin-based anti-aesthetic' and observes that 'heroin plays perhaps *the* central role as the object of desire – the narrator's, and, in terms of structure, the reader's' (260). Addiction, paradoxically, becomes a measure of health, not sickness, as it hastens the breakdown of oppressive and repressive boundaries between the inner and outer worlds, between reality and imagination, life and text. Thus an apparently counter-cultural tool is utilized in an attempt to achieve personal liberation, the professedly primary goal of the cultural majority. So personal is this liberation that the projects of writer and hero are deliberately conflated. The hero's name is Joe Necchi (an echo of Trocchi), and Necchi's project is to write *Cain's Book*, his (and Trocchi's) 'work in progress, in regress' (31).

The drugs market, by virtue of being a 'market', is riddled with contradictions, for as Robert Hewison comments in *Too Much*: 'It is a profound irony that one means of reaching inner-space, drugs, should have depended on dealers who operated as primitive entrepreneurial capitalists in an entirely unregulated economy' (149). Drug addiction, Trocchi's narrator claims, is 'born of a respect for the whole chemistry of alienation' (26), yet it is an addiction to substances that epitomise the fetishized nature of commodity. Just as drugs are compromised by capitalism, so we should expect drug-induced textual effects to be compromised by the mores of the

society in which they are circulating. The novel's experimentation with drug-fuelled narrative exposes these contradictions. Sue Wiseman notes how 'ambivalently, then, in *Cain's Book* heroin is the drug to counter the spectacle and to bring about the removal of content, but it also, paradoxically, provides the fiction with a rhythm and a kind of structure'. Ironically, 'the reader is always reading in relation to the text's next 'fix' (or injection of energy) which, when it comes, releases the text's flood of memories, narrative' (261). Rather than disrupting the traditional narrative, the text fosters the reader's addiction *to* that narrative. Trocchi, by virtue of his nationality, is automatically excluded from the literary community addressed by this thesis. *Cain's Book* is included here, however, for the instructive example it makes of the way in which the counter-culture replicated the value-systems of the main culture in the paradoxical anti-patriarchal reproduction of patriarchal binaries.

Trocchi, for all his subaltern and counter-cultural credentials, is far from anti-rational. *Cain's Book* presents heroin as a means of focusing the attention and imagination upon interiority:

The perceiving turns inward, the eyelids droop, the blood is aware of itself, a slow phosphorescence in all the fabric of flesh and nerve and bone; it is that the organism has a sense of being intact and unbrittle, and, above all, *inviolable*. For the attitude born of this sense of inviolability some Americans have used the word 'cool'. (8)

This interiority, rather than subject to the vagaries of subjectivity, is characterised by the fact that it is profoundly ontologically and physically stable ('unbrittle') and freed from physical urges ('the effect of heroin is to remove all physical urgency from the thought of sex', 61). Heroin may allegedly result in an organic blend of mind and matter, but the mind is still sovereign in 'Castle Keep' (26) and the irrationality of sexual desire is banished. Indeed, interiority is figured as some sort of essentialist respite from the rigours of the existential condition, for on heroin: 'one is no longer grotesquely involved in the becoming. One simply is' (8). In his essay 'Trocchi on Drugs', Trocchi wrote of heroin: 'What excites one is not the drug, but what the drug makes available to experience' (375). The title of the collection in which this essay appears, *Artificial Paradises*, is telling, as the phrase describing a chemically-induced 'high' also hints at a lingering sense of the unnaturalness of focusing upon the internal, the personal, the subjective. In *Cain's Book*, this nagging doubt has an unexpected effect on a text supposedly striving to liberate itself and the reader from the strictures of a divisive system and a divided self: 'A man will find out who he is. Cain, Abel. And then he will make the image of himself coherent in itself, but only in so far as it is prudent will he allow it to be contradictory to the external world' (30). 'Prudence' seems a peculiar watchword for an innovator and an outsider. Heroin does liberate Joe's memories into the text, but they appear

in the form of a realistic, aetiological narrative, reminiscent of nothing so much as that quintessential work of Glasgow realism, Archie Hind's *The Dear Green Place*. Joe's professed aesthetic agenda is very different. He proclaims it frequently throughout the novel, as here to Jake, a woman living aboard a scow moored close to his:

I told her that the great urgency for literature was that it should for once and for all accomplish its dying, that it wasn't that writing shouldn't be written, but that a man should annihilate prescriptions of all past from in his own soul, refuse to consider what he wrote in terms of literature, judge it solely in terms of his living. (101)

The objective of the young (explicitly male) writer is a subjective one. He must liberate himself from Harold Bloom's 'anxiety of influence', or what Joe more evocatively describes as an 'odour of ancestors' (184), by casting off objective literary forms:

For a long time now I have felt that writing which is not ostensibly self-conscious is in a vital way inauthentic for our time. For our time – I think every statement should be dated. Which is another way of saying the same thing. I know of no young man who is not either an ignoramus or a fool who can take the old objective forms for granted. Is there no character in the book large enough to doubt the validity of the book itself? (45)

Traditional realism, according to this pronouncement, is no longer supportable by the young and the male. Yet, just as Joe is never free from the nagging doubt that his free-wheeling, odd-jobbing, transatlantic lifestyle is the contemporary equivalent of his father's long stretch of economically-enforced unemployment in Glasgow, so he constantly craves the stability of

the old objectivity. Joe notes an obsession to 'stick to the facts. A fine empirical principle, but below the level of language the facts slide away like a lava' (9). That empirical principle, however, is still ultimately 'fine', if only in principle. Fay, a fellow addict, tells him:

'Cain is great.'

'Yeah, not necessarily for anyone else. It's all I've got except Now... you know?'

'Sure,' Fay said, 'It's evidence.'

'Yeah, Kilroy was here.' (24)

Though the novel is 'not necessarily for anyone else', Joe still writes it to meet his objective standards of empiricism and to register his existence in a public world, like spraying a record of Kilroy's presence on a wall. Objectivity involves the concealment of the personal nature of its source, yet an expression of interiority demands that that source be foregrounded. Rather than recognizing that this dilemma over subjectivity is a profoundly gendered one, stemming as it does from a masculine epistemology that grants superiority to the objective, the tendency is to read the contradiction as inherent in an out-dated literary mode. Modernity is blamed, not masculinity; hence the fact that so many male authors' forays into the interior become novels about novels, about the writer at his writing. These authors investigate with a desperate sincerity what Irigaray asked with irony: 'Perhaps this is the time to stress *technique* again?' (*Speculum*, 136). In



attempting to find words for a region masculinity has always defined as wordless, it seems that, as in *Cain's Book*, the male writer remains addicted to the expression of the universality of his plight.

In the early stages of the novel, Joe announces another agendum, a pledge that drugs are something 'we must vigilantly keep in the public domain' (32). Thomas Hinde's 1968 *High* keeps drugs in the public domain, but with less radical intentions towards using that high to disrupt narrative. Rather than the stimulus of an anti-aesthetic, the novel prevents drugs from infiltrating the aesthetic at all. Its protagonist, Maurice Peterson, takes acid with his girlfriend and a young male student. He is about to start writing, then stops:

He doesn't want to lose a moment of this sensational experience. And he is anyway unsure whether he wants to write in their presence. There is a basic contradiction about writing in public, a suggestion that it's possible to live and at the same time indulge this compensation for not living. Either the writing will fail or they will resent – rightly – the fact that he's going away on this compensatory private trip, when their adventure should be in common. (273-74)

The boundaries between drugs and writing, and between living and writing, remain intact, and the unusual use of the present tense (in *High*) in this description heightens the contrast with its 'authentic', past-tense narrative. Hinde's novel, however, concerns itself more extensively with another high, a sexual one.

## (Hetero-) Sex

A burgeoning frankness about heterosexual practices was apparent in Britain since the 1948 publication of the first Kinsey Report, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*. Conducted in the United States, its revelations were nevertheless widely read and very influential in Britain, most notoriously, that of the incidence of homosexual experience amongst its sample of 5,300 white males.<sup>1</sup> The Sixties, too, saw a new ubiquity of contraception, particularly the Pill, allowing sex to occur more frequently outside the patriarchal, reproductive framework we saw to be so dominant in Chapters Two and Three. The British equivalent of Kinsey, Masters and Johnson, published their research, *The Human Sexual Response*, in 1966, but by this time heterosexual psychosexual liberation had already become synonymous with the liberation of human expression, thanks in no small part to the obscenity trial surrounding the publication of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Regina v. Penguin Books Ltd, 1960). The fact that such a synonymity could and did occur within the popular consciousness, I will argue, speaks volumes about the gendering of that consciousness.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Homosexual activity in the human male is much more frequent than is ordinarily realized [...]. In the youngest unmarried group, more than a quarter (27.3%) of the males have some homosexuality activity to the point of orgasm [...]. The incidence among these single males rises in successive age groups until it reaches a maximum of 38.7 per cent between 36 and 40 years of age.' (259)

In the essay 'Writing the Body: Toward an understanding of *l'écriture féminine*', Ann Rosalind Jones delineates the feminist project to write the (female) body as follows:

What Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous do in common, then, is to oppose women's bodily experience (or, in Kristeva's case, women's bodily effect as mothers) to the phallic/symbolic patterns embedded in Western thought. Although Kristeva does not privilege women as the only possessors of prephallogocentric discourse, Irigaray and Cixous go further: if women are to discover and express who they are, to bring to the surface what masculine history has repressed in them, they must begin with their sexuality. And their sexuality begins with their bodies, with their genital and libidinal difference from men. (361)

In the era under investigation within this thesis, the liberation of the body from the repressive restraints of Western thinking was still officially to be dubbed a feminist project by the academy. However, as sexuality's traditional definition placed it in opposition to reason and language, and thus to received definitions of selfhood, it is already, by default, marked a *feminine* project. Richard Sennett, in his doom-laden *The Fall of Public Man*, mourns the abandonment of the public arena for the feminized private: 'It is the generation born after World War II which has turned inward as it has liberated itself from sexual constraints; it is in this same generation that most of the physical destruction of the public domain has occurred' (15-16). The concept of the body, saturated with its own materiality, as quintessentially feminine, and the mind as masculine, like nature v. culture, and private v. public, is a polarization lingering from the Enlightenment. Yet if female

sexuality can be considered to contain the potential to deconstruct and destroy 'phallic/symbolic patterns' through an exploration of 'genital and libidinal difference from men', male sexuality too should have similar liberational potential in its authentic expression. As this thesis repeatedly stresses, male  $\neq$  masculine, and penis  $\neq$  phallus. 'Masculine' writing, as we have seen, characteristically effaces the body, thus the expression of bodily reality and physical desire is a potentially radical step for male literary liberation. This is emphatically not because sexuality is somehow more authentic than other human experience, for as Foucault concludes strongly in his introduction to *The History of Sexuality*: 'Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct' (105). Sexuality is not innate, but as a construct it is in a potent position of opposition to masculinity.

In the era under investigation, masculine defensive action against the accusation of feminization in writing about sex frequently takes predictable forms. For the first time, almost totally reliable contraceptive methods offered both men and women the opportunity to explore (at least in theory) sex on both a quantitative and qualitative scale. For men so minded, the unfettered nature of that sexuality could be couched as the unleashing of the primal force of male desire from its cultural fetters. Lawrentian literature,

and *Chatterley* in particular (both text and court case), provided a perfect template for the conflation of the expression of the essential, sexual male with the liberation of all humanity. (Foucault, with his [or his translator's] reference to the hypnotic cultural power of sex in contemporary society as 'the dark shimmer of sex' (157), illustrates the persistent power of Lawrentian sexual terminology.) Just as female and male readers can be immasculated by the attendant principles they are obliged to accept in order to gain utopian narrative satisfaction, so a population striving for psychic and sexual liberation is encouraged to seek that liberation amidst the pages of a novel which transfigures male sexuality into religious might. Masculine epistemology masquerades both as ontology and theology. John Thomas, his nomenclature marking his independence from Mellors the appendage, is a principle, a phallus, a godhead – not a penis. Feminized physicality is overridden by masculine power, the congenital by the dynamic. In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett concludes that:

While insisting his mission is the noble and necessary task of freeing sexual behaviour of perverse inhibition, purging the fiction which describes it of prurient or prudish euphemism, Lawrence is really the evangelist of quite another cause – 'phallic consciousness'. This is far less a matter of 'the resurrection of the body', 'natural love', or other slogans under which it has been advertised, than the transformation of masculine ascendancy into a mystical religion, international, possibly institutionalized. This is sexual politics in its most overpowering form. (238)

Perhaps because of this reflex conflation of 'natural', or congenital, sexuality with the feminine, male-authored novels of the English Sixties, if they do assert sexuality as a potential source of authenticity, tend to do so from an existential viewpoint (as we have already witnessed in the work of Colin Wilson). Sex has existentialist, as well as essentialist, uses. In her article, 'Feminism, Marxism, Method, And the State: An Agenda for Theory', Catharine A. MacKinnon summarizes the structural pattern of traditional heterosexual relations as follows: 'Man fucks woman: subject verb object' (541). The existential creed has been established in the preceding chapter: if a man acts, it makes him an existential subject. If a man fucks, then, this makes him a man. This is a grammatical pattern too, of course, and its effect upon the grammar of narrative will be considered in more detail below.

MacKinnon's work is open to criticism for its repetitive descriptions of contemporary society that make little attempt to explain why that society should be as it is, but this formula provides a useful synopsis of the way in which we might expect male authors of the period to utilize a literary exploration of heterosexuality as a means of asserting the masculine existential subject.

Existential action anticipates results. Hinde's *High* takes as its setting an America presented as being far in advance in terms of female sexual liberation than England, for the most part because of its head-start in



distributing the Pill. The protagonist Maurice Peterson initiates an affair with his young American student Jill for the liberation it promises from reproductive sexuality and the responsibility for those he refers to as 'Nancy's children', who 'often seemed to him like rubber children, undamageable' (15). 'The Pill. My life depends on it' (126), Jill tells him, rejecting an existence of rubbers and rubber children. The nuclear family is non-degradable, artificial, and opposed to the thrilling contingency of sexual experimentation. Yet the nuclear family is also the primary tool of patriarchal power. Judith Roof, quoted earlier in this chapter, noted how 'the bourgeois need for the correct narrative, one effected by proper heterosexual, reproductive sexuality, and good timing, positions sexuality as itself causal' (35). Though contraception indisputably liberated men sexually, the anxiety it produced should not be underestimated. Contraception interferes with reproduction and it also interferes with the masculine narrative. Roof's book brands narrative heterosexual for its reproduction of reproductive sexuality: heterosexual it indisputably *is*, but it is also patriarchal and, as I have been arguing, to some extent *masculine*. Roof refers to what she calls the 'counterreproductive perverse' (xxiii) and its potential to disrupt this narrative with homosexual desire. The effects of such disruption were apparent in *Radcliffe*. Contraception itself might also be nominated an element of the counterreproductive perverse in male-authored novels of this

period. Its use is tantamount to a dereliction of patriarchal reproductive duty. It upsets the cause and effect of heterosexuality, and in doing so, the traditional gender roles of that sexuality, in which the masculine man pursues and initiates, and the feminine woman eludes, denies, but finally succumbs. Contraception's interference with aetiology has existential implications, or rather, it has implications for an existentialism interpreted through masculine tenets of belief. In Fowles's *The Magus*, Urfe refers with distaste to the 'contracepted excitement' of slick contemporary sexual exchanges (231), and one of his self-defining aspirations towards the close of the original novel (the passage does not appear in the 1977 reprint) is to exert himself upon an unprotected (uncontracepted) Alison:

That bruised face, very near tears, but not in tears. I thought, I will get her on a bed and I will ram her. I will ram her and ram her, the cat will fall and fall, till she is full of me, possessed by me. And I thought, Christ help her if she tries to shield herself with the accursed wall of rubber. If she tries to put anything between my vengeance and her punishment. Christ help her. (614)

In *High*, eventually rejected by Jill, Maurice Peterson throws himself into a tortured plot in the novel he is writing, in which the protagonist Peter Morrison is on a road-trip with his student lover Olga. Olga, she claims, has forgotten her Pill, the pill Peter classifies as her 'Anti-conception pills', in contrast to the 'Conception pills', speed, they are both popping as they travel (311). Initially opposed to reproductive conception, and thus to the

patriarchal family, the Pill now also lies in opposition to *intellectual* conception, to productive thought itself: it becomes 'contraconception'. Further distaste for its chemical mechanism is expressed in Morrison's jokey response to her announcement:

For the first time he understood the seriousness of what she was saying. He was shocked and still more determined not to show it. 'Why not let me add them when I cable my bank? "SEND URGENTLY TWO THOUSAND BUCKS, TWENTY-ONE PILLS." It's the new currency, didn't you know?' (310)

In *High*, sex has become part of the economy, the Pill its new facilitator of exchange, and the consumer economy utilized as an indicator of lost authenticity. Making sex public is concomitant with the reduction of its mystical primitivism, and contraception interferes with its reproductive effects.

In this process of consumption, where does enthusiasm become greed? Maurice Peterson's campus is home to a certain Dr Heinz, a psychiatrist of shady yet Central European origin, who coldly berates a group of American party guests on their national obsession with the female orgasm. He calls it 'your special invention. I would like to say your contribution to Western Civilisation, but this I cannot' (87). The character, of course, functions to a large extent as a mockery of recently outmoded patriarchal psychoanalytic discourse, but his branding of the female orgasm as an American (foreign, suspect) invention is replicated throughout the

novel. Jill's bed-post holds scores for 'MP' (Maurice Peterson) and 'Others':

"'Christ alive," she gasped. "Twice. Do you realise. I came *twice*. Hey, quick, gimme," and she reached for the pencil they now kept ready' (158).

The female orgasm, its literary potential once defined by its essential rarity and elusiveness, has become in *High's* America a quantitative experience.

Maurice Peterson's novel takes this perceived degradation further, with a hallucinogenic twist: on Peter Morrison's first encounter of Olga, he pretends to be a Marine Biologist in order to increase the seductive eroticism of the unusual that has already been conveyed upon him by his foreign nationality.

He tells her about the reproductive methods of the angler fish:

'Now comes the exciting part. Whenever she ovulates they ejaculate. They do it automatically. A chemical signal passes from her blood to theirs – remember they're still biting her. So in practice they become nothing more than appended testes.'

'Hey, that's cute.' She stared up, big-eyed at him. 'That really so?' (72)

This functions in Maurice's novel on one level as a piscine metaphor for the reflex, inauthentic nature of heterosexual reproduction, but on another as a

vision of a heterosexuality in which the male is nothing but an auxiliary

appendage. Sexuality has become fraught with (female) consumer reflexes.

During his road-trip with Olga, Peter Morrison takes her out for increasingly elaborate and expensive meals, all of which involve her consumption of fish.

During these meals, he eats little and says less, listening to the constant

chattering inventory of her past lovers. Fish have become symbolic not of the feminine so much as an essential femaleness equated with a greedy consumption that corrupts the basic function of sexuality: the irrefutable demonstration, through conception, of male potency. Maurice Peterson watches Jill reading one of his published novels in the bath and notes 'a suggestion that she was eating the book which worried him: eating it rather impatiently. Propped there, her feet together, her hands raised to hold it above the water, she suggested a big-eyed reading fish' (146). The sense of inauthenticity generated by the corruption of perceivedly primal heterosexual relations has again leaked into that always problematic masculine mode of self assertion: writing itself. Contemporary literature, *High* included, is increasingly an arena for debating questions of progeny. Maurice Peterson writes of Peter Morrison's increasing anxiety over the deliberate artifice of contemporary novels in the *Albert Angelo* mould:

It began with a book he'd once reviewed, published with a neat rectangular hole penetrating page 251 and the seven below, so disclosing several lines of page 267. A green hand-out from the author had explained that this was to enable readers to get a partial preview of a certain coming event. It had maddened him. What could he ever invent which would compete with that for self-conscious idiocy? (18)

Morrison goes on to fret further:

At this moment, disturbingly, the idea came to him that he wasn't a person at all, just a pose, a fantasy of someone else's – or his own – imagination. A compulsive puffed-up pretence, an inflated complex of gestures with no internal co-ordinating principle, directed entirely from



outside, solely for the outside impression they'd make. He was exasperated at his own compulsively characterful behaviour.... (20)

Peter Morrison is, of course, not a person at all, but a character in Maurice Peterson's novel, so his paranoia is justified. Another *High* text-within-the-text is Dr Heinz's manuscript of *The Singing Priests*, supposedly written by a woman (his wife?) who killed herself, but which may alternatively have been written by him. The reader eventually reads the text of this manuscript as it is read by Peter Morrison in the novel by Maurice Peterson. Within the textual world of *High*, origins are irreparably confused. The novel becomes riddled with complex paragraph openings like: 'A bad day today, Morrison read (Peterson wrote)' (135). An infuriated Peterson demands of Dr Heinz:

'Even if it's a novel, [...] how much of it's true? How real are the people? Is the man really still here on campus? How can he bear to be? And who wrote it? Did she? Was it a therapeutic exercise you set her? Can I assume that you're the man she consults? Or did *you* write it?' As he talked he became more and more preoccupied with the problem.

'And why do strange things start to happen to me every time I read it? that's what worries me most. I feel compelled to write a second part to it. And into this I feed real people so that I can no longer judge whether they're real in the original or not. Did you know this would happen – how could you? Is that why you lent it me?' (169)

Peter Morrison ultimately assesses *The Singing Priests* as 'psychic masturbation' (141). Here, as throughout *High*, inauthentic sexuality (defined as heterosexuality compromised in its reproductive function) is equated with writing compromised in its assertion of the masculine writer. *The Singing Priests* is compromised in literary value because its source is



uncertain, and may even be female. It is written in a female voice, and in the first-person, as if to emphasise its instability as a narrative. In Hinde's novel, femininity is opposed to writing on the grounds of its inherent inarticulacy: at the start of the novel, Maurice longs to join Jill 'in her real unverbal world' (94-95). Femininity is also traditionally opposed to the masculine in its sexuality and emotion. (Masculine) Writing is equated with rationality and with realism. *High*, an attempt to negotiate contextual demands to couch sexuality as a means of liberation, resolves the opposition of sexuality to traditional literary realism by ultimately upholding a view of heterosex as necessarily reproductive, and thus necessarily grammatical: 'man fucks woman', and woman conceives. Male sexual fulfilment and its purportedly 'natural' effect, conception, are linked to literary conception and *its* natural fulfilment, a realistic novel. When this grammar is interrupted, then so too is the masculine narrative, forced into an 'unnatural' demonstration of its own artifice. This unnaturalness is impressed upon the reader by means of an impossibly complex narrative structure. Sexual revolution, *High* seeks to demonstrate, is possible only through a revolution in literary form. Though difficult, that revolution is grudgingly admitted to be necessary. However vertiginous the consequences, its rejection, Hinde suggests through Maurice Peterson's conclusion to his novel about Peter Morrison, results in claustrophobic defeatism: 'Now, when he had acted, emerging a man – if a

dead one – from her fishy womb, how could he bear to make this new retreat to his own booky womb?’ (346). This final phrase, however, limits the extent to which Hinde might be celebrated as embracing such a revolution.

Peterson/Morrison’s retreat might lead to claustrophobia, but it is claustrophobia of a (re)productive space, and an appropriated one – the womb.

Published in 1972, John Berger’s novel *G.* serves to demarcate the temporal limit of this thesis’s examination of male-authored post-war fiction before the Second Wave in an interesting way. Its involved engagement with feminism, of course, serves to illustrate the arbitrary (though necessary) nature of designating 1972 as the very beginning of a concerted movement, for its dedication already reads: ‘For Anya and for her sisters in Women’s Liberation’ (5). Berger’s reworking of the Don Juan myth shows sisterly solidarity in cherishing female knowledge (portrayed to be predominantly bodily rather than intellectual) as profoundly authentic and liberatory. As a child, *G.*’s crush on Miss Helen, his governess, leads him to consider her the fount of all the answers to his questions. *G.*’s child-like, unadulterated assessment of Miss Helen is vindicated by the narrative of his life and the novel: ‘He senses or feels that she – by being all that is opposite and therefore complementary to him – can make the world complete for him. In adults sexual passion reconstitutes this sense. In a five-year-old it does not have to

be reconstituted: it is still part of his inheritance' (49). 'Opposite and therefore complementary': though radical in respect of the gender oppositions we have encountered in the novels considered so far, it is notable how Berger's sexual utopia remains a site of ruthlessly maintained sexual difference. This pattern of (without exception, hetero-) sexual attraction revealing truth is replicated in the description and effect of all G.'s adult sexual encounters, as the women he selects are utilised by the text to represent a purer mode of physical being, uncorrupted by public mores and expectations:

Beatrice is a woman without morality or ambition because she is incapable of surprising herself. She can propose nothing unfamiliar to herself. This self-knowledge is not the result of prolonged introspection but, rather, of having always been familiar, like an animal, with the patterns of action and reaction necessary to satisfy her own unquestioned needs.

It is possible that I make her sound like an idiot. If so, I do her an injustice. (36);

[Marika] made very little distinction between the idea of an action and the action itself; the words which expressed the idea tended to translate themselves straight away into messages to her limbs (288).

These women, it would seem, by virtue of their social exclusion, are already liberated from the artificial constrictions of public mores and moralities.

Wanting and being with liberated women is, for men, a means both of sexual and personal liberation.

The politics of heterosexual experience, the novel argues, have enormous potential. Following Marcuse, in *G.* authentic sex is the antithesis

of the capitalist socio-economic order and the encroachment of that order upon heterosexual relationships. Sex, in other words, can be socialist. As a heterosexual male outsider, G., like Don Juan, defines himself in opposition to a bourgeois world of inauthentic sexuality, where the male majority uses sex as a means of ownership. G. silently accuses Monsieur Hennequin and the businessman Harry Schuwey of believing that 'to touch is to claim as property. To fuck is to possess. And you take possession either by paying rent or by buying outright' (197). 'To fuck is to possess': in the anti-utopia, power is empirically demonstrated by means of sex. In the introduction to *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault notes how, (in an age of repression), 'the sexual cause – the demand for sexual freedom, but also for the knowledge to be gained from sex and the right to speak about it – becomes legitimately associated with the honor of a political cause' (6). Berger's novel revels in the Second Wave's advantage over its matriarchs: Laura, G.'s mother, must, in the nineteenth century, necessarily reject the innate knowledge of her own body for an effective engagement with the body politic: 'In London she became more and more involved in her political interests. The secret of life, she considered, was no longer hidden in her own body but in the evolutionary process' (36). 'The knowledge to be gained from sex and the right to speak about it': as in much of the male-authored work we have considered, G. as a manifesto lies caught between these distinct concepts of

sex as both primal knowledge and political dynamism, essential and existential. G. merits his repeated nomination as 'principle protagonist' (9, 11, 27) because he chooses to act, randomly and sexually, disrupting class- and race-ridden Europe with his indiscrimination in female sexual partners. He finds fulfilment with servants and society sophisticates alike. In contrast, contemporary and capitalist masculinity remains static amidst his trajectories:

A man's presence was dependent upon the promise of power which he embodied. If the promise was large and credible, his presence was striking. If it was small or incredible, he was found to have little presence. There were men, even many men, who were devoid of presence altogether. The promised power may have been moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, sexual – but its object was always exterior to the man. A man's presence suggested what he was capable of doing to you or for you. (166)

These men have relinquished action for the symbolisation of the potential to do, and contemporary manhood is existentialism stalled. Yet, as well as an existential hero, G. also functions as an agent of primal desires. In his article 'Marxist Fictions: The Novels of John Berger', Joseph H. McMahon notes how the First World War, about to begin as the novel ends, is also properly designated a 'libidinal monster' (220). G.'s similarly 'ungoverned libidinal force' (220), he argues, is distinguished from the bad male primal of mindless destruction by virtue of his intellectual choices, however paltry the context in which they are made. The choice to channel the primal (male) libido into

authentic political rebellion becomes conflated with an existential assertion against nothingness. Once again, here, the essential and the existential interplay to bolster the heroism of a male protagonist.

G.'s critique of contemporary history and the History it produces depends upon the then still revolutionary recognition of a now familiar opposition – that of History and herstory, the artificial masculine grand narrative and the earthy feminine mundane:

The horse and harness smell is the antithesis of the cowshed smell. Each can only be properly defined by reference to the other. The shed smell means milk, cloth, figures of women squatting hunched up and small against the cow flank, liquid shit, mulch, warmth, pink hands and udders almost the same colour, the absolute absence of secrecy and the names of the cows: Fancy, Pretty, Lofty, Cloud, Pie, Little-eyes.

The horse and harness smell is associated for [G.] with the eminent nature of his own body (like suddenly being aware of his own warmth), with pride – for he rides well and his uncle praises him, with the hair of his pony's mane and with his anticipation of a man's world. (43)

The novel explores whether history and historiography might be made to incorporate individual sexual experience, and there is an attempt to combine these perspectives (History/herstory) in an inclusive narrative idiom (as opposed to exclusionary objectivity). Its form is constructed around a narrator who alternates between first-person metaphysical and metafictional discussions on the one hand and the third-person narration of the novel's plot on the other. As a text, G. attempts to prevent either the objectivity of the narrator or the subjectivity of the protagonist from dictating its



viewpoint. It does this by repeatedly declaring the fallibility of the narrator's cognitive privilege – 'What the old man says I do not know. What the boy says in reply I do not know. To pretend would be to schematize' (61) – and by focalizing its third-person portions through a variety of different characters, both male and female. The template for this gender-reciprocity of voice is provided in the text when the young G. overhears his uncle and aunt, Jocelyn and Beatrice, siblings, and, it is revealed later, sexual partners:

The boy listens on the stairs to their talking in the bedroom. Later he will realize that the cadence of their two voices is like that of a couple talking in bed: not amorously but calmly, reflectively, with pauses and ease. [...] Their words are not decipherable to the boy on the stairs. But the manner in which the male voice and the feminine voice overlap, provoke and receive each other, the two complementary substances of their voices, as distinct from one another as metal and stone, or as wood and leather, yet combining by rubbing together or chipping or scraping to make the noise of their dialogue – this is more eloquent than precise over-heard words could ever be, eloquent of the power of the decisions being taken. Against these decisions no third person, no listener, can appeal. (42)

This moment is instructive, too, in its valorisation of cadence over vocabulary. G. is frequently critically perceived to be an utterly anonymous hero, yet large portions of the text are emotionally focalized through him, particularly at the beginning and end of the novel. His forest encounter with the dead dray-horses (56-9), for example, is powerfully and emotively described, and his nausea rises again in response to Monsieur Hennequin's sophisticated gentleman's agreement over access to the body of his wife

(303), the experiences linked with a common smell of paraffin. Yet still Geoff Dyer can remark in *Ways of Telling: The Work of John Berger*:

What of G.? We know his history but almost nothing about him. There is probably no novel of comparable length in which the principle protagonist speaks so few lines (what few lines there are amount to little more than blank expression of politeness.) He is felt as a powerful physical presence but communicates nothing about himself. (89)

G., in other words, is a troubling hero as he does not speak, and speaking yourself is conflated, by Dyer and by the traditional tenets of masculinity, with protagonism. He is a radical hero not because he is anonymous, but rather because we as readers know frequently how he feels, though infrequently what he has to say. The tone of the first-person narrative is innovative, too, and stands in contrast to the 'I' of, say, *The Unfortunates*. It is open and confessional without expectation of a confessional increment. In the process of describing a dream, the narrator asserts of his chosen personal pronoun: 'I keep on saying "we" because I wasn't by myself, but I wasn't with any other specific people either, I was in the first person plural' (136). This resonates with Johnson's ideal of the 'collective-subjective', and the multiple-focalizations of Berger's novel ensure that G. is closer to achieving this bilateral narrative ideal than *The Unfortunates*. The ultimate refutation both of objectivity and solipsism in the novel, however, is specifically sexual, and more specifically the orgasm, the moment when the equation 'the

experience = I + life' (125) holds fleetingly absolute. This utopia, however, is antithetical to narrative, as to language itself:

How to write about this? This equation is inexpressible in the third person and in narrative form. The third person and the narrative form are clauses in a contract agreed between writer and reader, on the basis that the two of them can understand the third person more fully than he can understand himself; and this destroys the very terms of the equation.

Applied to the central moment of sex, all written nouns denote their objects in such a way that they reject the meaning of the experience to which they are meant to apply. [...] They are foreign, not because they are unfamiliar to reader or writer, but precisely because they are their third-person nouns. (125-26)

Language, in other words, is always to a certain extent objective, inevitably placing both its writer and its reader in an elevated 'seat of sense-making' which here, in contrast to the novels of Chapter Two, is undesirable and unfulfilling. Sex in *G.* is supposedly supremely natural, a repository of real, immanent experience for its heterosexual participants. Ann Rosalind Jones is able to note by 1981 that: 'All in all, at this point in history, most of us perceive our bodies through a jumpy, contradictory mesh of hoary sexual symbolization and political counter-response' (363). In *G.* in 1972, however, sex is celebrated as resoundingly pre-cultural, and as such, has the potential to liberate not just humanity, but also the traditional construction of narrative from its constricting cultural limitations. Heterosex demands that its narrator enters into a direct and immediate confrontation with reality:

All generalizations are opposed to sexuality.

Every feature that makes her desirable asserts its contingency – here, here, here, here, here.  
That is the only poem to be written about sex – here, here, here, here – now. (124)

Literary sex is redemptive, in other words, because its immediacy refuses the possibility of objective description. Writing the body is understood as involving its writer and its reader in a redemptive confrontation with the inauthenticity of traditional writing: ‘why does writing about sexual experience reveal so strikingly what may be a general limitation of literature in relation to aspects of all experience?’ (124), the narrator asks. Yet this places the narrator of *G.* in a paradoxical position in relation to the characters he narrates. A third person, or the third-person, is associated throughout the novel with ignorance and exclusion, as when the young Giovanni witnesses his mother looking at his father: ‘It is a look which confesses a secret common interest deriving from some past experience from which, by its nature rather than by its timing, he is conscious of being inevitably excluded. It is a look which makes him conscious of being the third person’ (76). *G.*, when older, receives such a look himself from his aunt just before losing his virginity:

The look in Beatrice’s eyes being in equal measure appealing and grateful is not the result of these two feelings co-existing. There is only one feeling. She has only one thing to say with her uncontrollable eyes. Nothing exists for her beyond this single feeling. She is grateful for what she appeals for; she appeals for what she is already grateful for. (128)

Beatrice's look is no gaze, and unlike Sartre's and Silverman's look, it does not lack, but is complete. Simply put, this is a look of desire, and true heterosexual desire in *G.* mends the flaws in heterosexual relationships (in which women are forced, 'unnaturally', to be both 'surveyor and surveyed', 167) and supplements the lack in looking. Yet if existential authenticity is concomitant with authentic sexual intimacy, then three within the textual relationship becomes a crowd. The reader or narrator of a sex scene written in the third-person are textual gooseberries, unfulfilled, embarrassed, and embarrassing.

A solution to this problem is wrought within the narrative of *G.*, but it is a solution that ultimately undermines the careful gender-reciprocity of the novel's focalization. It contains a number of slippages between first- and third-person narration, and, tellingly, these occur at the moments of *G.*'s seduction of a varied portfolio of women. Declarations of love for these women in the first-person are attributed to *G.*, if at all, only as an afterthought:

Why do I want to describe her experience exhaustively, definitively, when I fully recognize the impossibility of doing so? Because I love her. I love you, Leonie. You are beautiful. You are gentle. You can feel pain and pleasure. You are tiny and I take you in my hand. You are large as the sky and I walk under you. It was he who said this (150-51);

Camomille, he says. A classmate used to make the same joke at school. There is only the difference of a syllable. What is it that you love in me? she asks.



Your dreams, your elbows, the doubts at the four corners of your confidence, the unusual warmth of your hair, everything that you want but are frightened of, the smallness of –  
I am frightened of nothing in myself and you know nothing about me. Nothing? I know all that I have written about you.  
Who is speaking? (223);

Marika, how I love you! Your smile is more complete than any last judgement. When you take off your clothes you are pure will. We make each other bodiless. All the rest are talkers or sensualists.  
Marika! When will G. say this? (291).

When it comes to the physical and metaphysical appreciation of women, G. can provide only one perspective, and it is male. It is also, of course, heterosexual. In a novel that makes the claim for sexual desire to revolutionize narrative, there remain scrupulous limitations upon the permitted origins and directions of that desire.

These limitations are still more apparent within the descriptions of sex themselves. There is one example of an attempt to relocate male desire away from the penis, which begins in a description of the taste of sugar:

This is a taste whose effects are not confined to the mouth.

Sweetness is like Eurydice's thread: it leads from the tongue down the throat and then, mysteriously, through the stomach to the sexual centre, to the tiny region (distinct in a male from the sexual organs themselves) where sexual pleasure accumulates before extending outwards in waves. (51-52)

Otherwise, however, the text makes no attempt to diffuse male sexual pleasure. The difficulty of writing the male body is that, thanks for the most part to masculinity's eternal metonymic project to conflate manhood with



universality, biology with destiny, the penis as liberatory symbol is supremely difficult to distinguish from the phallus, instrument of patriarchal oppression. Writing the penis, of course, could be construed as a means of demystifying the phallus, and G. addresses itself to the possibilities of using the penis (as opposed to the phallus) as a vision of physical beauty:

Formerly [Camille] has been aware of men wanting to choose her to satisfy desires already rooted in them, her and not another, because among the women available she has approximated the closest to what they need. Whereas he appears to have no needs. [...] The taste of his foreskin and of a single tear of transparent first sperm which has broken over the cyclamen head making its surface even softer to the touch than before, is the taste of herself made flesh in another. (226-27)

The reference to a cyclamen echoes G's loss of virginity with Beatrice: 'thus a cyclamen opening' (129). In its first appearance, the image of the flower is used to convey a fresh naturalness, and here it hearkens back to that firstness. The apprehension of this vision of unity is placed, significantly (and following *Lady Chatterley's Lover*), within a female consciousness, thus crediting and legitimating it with the natural instinct previously established to be innate in women. Throughout the novel, descriptions of G.'s penis remain femalely focalized:

It did not astound Marika that she saw him naked as he danced. What astounded her was that she saw his penis. She had never before seen a man on his feet with his penis erect. It changed the whole body of a man. [...] In bed, seen from above or from the side, a penis looks like an object or a vegetable or a fish. His, during the waltz, was indefinable. It was red. It was thrust forward in the direction of its own progress. Its head shifted a little from side to side, as a horse's head when galloping. Often

it was so acutely foreshortened that its body became invisible. All she saw was a darkness with a glowing ember at the entrance to it. She could smell the sulphur, she told herself, and it was making her feel giddy. (325-26)

‘An erection is the beginning of a process of total idealization’ (124), claims the narrator, but his narrative allows for an exclusively female idealization of the erection. Desire for the penis has to be female desire; a description by the narrator in the first-person would disrupt the narrator/protagonist relationship. This relationship, then, is ultimately less innovative than might at first be supposed: it is homosocial and homophobic. The desiring look, though alleged to be free from society’s enforcement of gender roles, is systematically coded as either masculine or feminine in opposition to its sexual object choice. The longed-for dissolution of culture can only take place, paradoxically, amidst culturally-imposed binary oppositions – gender.

In its examination of heterosexual relationships and the writing of those sexual relationships, *G.* has a valid agenda: imagining a male freedom, in tandem with women’s liberation, which is unbound from patriarchal and capitalist standards of objectivity and objectification. Yet, in its apprehension of gender at least, *G.* has flaws as a revolutionized *bildungsroman*, as ultimately it reads like an all too familiar narrative. Geoff Dyer reasserts *G.*’s existential credentials in the following way: ‘*G.*’s actions, then, are indistinguishable from the philanderer, but his determination to pursue his

own ends in the face of social convention is disruptive, subversive; his consciousness is revolutionary' (91). Dyer's and Berger's shifting of the means of the legitimisation of G. from the libidinal to the existential make it difficult to distinguish G.'s penis from the phallus and G.'s revolutionary sexual work from the comforting and continual conquest of Colin Wilson's Gerard Sorme. It is a temptation to view G.'s career as a philanderer, albeit an existentialist one, as a proffered means for men to fend off accusations of the contemporary male as '*castrati*' (88) amidst burgeoning female self-expression. More tangibly, although the focalization of the narrative may shift, G.'s narrator is always male, and his identification with G. at its strongest during the hero's fulfilment of heterosexual desire, when their characters become indistinguishable. The fact that this strong male identification occurs at the events in the text which its ideology upholds as both politically and spiritually vital for self-discovery, ensures that its narrative idiom finally denies inclusiveness. As this slippage between first- and third-person never occurs with any female, or any other, characters in the novel, the crucial and gender-specific relationship between the narrator and the protagonist, so prevalent in the masculine text, is maintained. After Chavez, the heroic adventurer has crashed on the far side of the Alps, Mathilde tells her friend Camille of their prolonged stay in an unprepossessing Alpine town: 'I believe we are waiting, my dear, for the

hero to die' (207). The narrator, from his privileged position, can note that 'next day, Chavez' last words, whose meaning cannot be interpreted, were: *Non, non, je ne meurs pas ... meurs pas*' (232). G. is indisputably a different kind of protagonist, but despite the novel's prolonged and innovative interrogation of traditional narrative, a vital tenet of his masculine textual credentials, the homosocial bond with a male narrator, is ultimately preserved. Such a bond, here proffering shares in the narrator's omniscience (he may not hear all, but he does see it), as well as the liberationist potential of sex with G.'s women, can thus be extended to the reader, provided they adopt the male, heterosexual viewpoint. The traditional hero, it would seem, is yet to die. Even with the best intentions, his mould is difficult to break.

## Youth

In Andrew Sinclair's *Magog*, the sequel to *Gog*, the obduracy of Rosa, a teenager in 1969, and possibly Magog's daughter, is conveyed by the following description of her idiolect:

She chatted in the cruel jargon of her time, that excluded the old and hinted at a Garden of Allah and Eden that was nearer than Kew, but only for the young. *Age and Experience Keep Off the Grass. No Professionals Need Apply.* In this age of arrogant adolescence, which knew everything first time round, Don Juan himself would have had few takers. (293)

(Following John Berger, and Kierkegaard, Don Juan, interestingly, is once again upheld as an adult male paragon.) The resentment at the exclusion from her meaning, or rather, her appropriation of exclusionary linguistic tactics, is apparent. The novel reveals other sources of discomfort surrounding Rosa – Maire, her mother's, promiscuity has led to doubts about Rosa's paternity – and there is also, of course, her sex: female progeny being only slightly less unsatisfactory within a patriarchal society than the failure of reproduction. Youth is both demonised and feminized as an affront to male power.

The final, and twenty-first, chapter of Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange*, published in 1962, concludes that Youth, portrayed throughout as a violent challenge to contemporary society, is actually a passing phase before real priorities kick in with an equilibrium of the hormones<sup>1</sup>. With the inclusion of this chapter, the novel retains its integrity as a *bildungsroman*, charting moral growth as well as, as Morrison points out (xx), its numerological patterning of three sections with seven chapters, with

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<sup>1</sup> Blake Morrison's introduction to the 1996 Penguin revised edition of the novel notes how this final chapter was dropped upon publication in the US in 1962, and only restored there on its reprinting in 1988. That edition included a preface by Burgess entitled '*A Clockwork Orange* Resucked', in which he claimed of the abridgement: 'My book was Kennedyan and accepted the notion of moral progress. What was really wanted was a Nixonian book with no shred of optimism in it' (quoted xvii). Morrison wryly notes that Burgess was therefore 'perhaps the first author ever, if his version of events is to be believed, to suffer from an American need for *pessimism*' (xvii).



Alex growing up on the occasion of the twenty-first. Berthold Schoene-Harwood sees the text's revolutionary potential as utterly sapped by the twenty first chapter:

In short, ineffectual, uncoordinated rebellion against the system in imitation of its own heroic ideals is superseded by a voluntary retreat into politically innocuous domestic bliss. As a closer analysis reveals, both ways of life – droogery and civil adulthood – are the result of successful patriarchal conditioning. Only for a limited period of time and under strictly outlawed circumstances is lower-class masculinity allowed to revel in the glamour of heroic action that is normally reserved exclusively for upper-class males. (76)

His identification of the novel with the sanctioned rebellion of 1950s

*Angry Young Men* is persuasive: indeed, Jimmy Porter's anti-battle cry is

echoed by Alex as he remarks: 'myself, I couldn't help a bit of

disappointment at things as they were those days. Nothing to fight against

really. Everything as easy as kiss-my-sharries. Still, the night was still very

young' (*Clockwork*, 14). The only good, brave cause may lie in bemoaning the

lack of such a cause, but male individualistic assertion in a society which

privileges male individual assertion still remains an act of conformity rather

than rebellion. I differ from Schoene-Harwood, however, in his assessment

of 'nadsat', 'Alex and his "droogs" arcane sociolect' (66), as similarly

symptomatic of patriarchal conformity, in the way that it:

Operates not only as a rebellious, anarchic counter-code but also as an elaborate adaptation of the neologistic diction favoured by comic-book superheroes. The more eloquent Alex's command of nadsat, the more successfully can he detach himself from the compromising



emotionality of his boyish self. Nadsat forms a crucial, constitutive part of the droogs' manly masquerade, merging them into a uniform elitist group and thereby perfecting the artifice of their fearless and seemingly invulnerable warrior masculinity. (66-67)

*A Clockwork Orange*, though it inarguably strives in opposition to the 'compromising emotionality' of youth, achieves this by the *suppression* of nadsat, not the fostering of a masculine ideal that is its inspiration.

The droogs' assault upon adulthood is conveyed by means of an attack upon traditional linguistic and literary values. Nadsat is conceived, both in the novel and the minds of its teenage inventors, as a threat, and despite its comic-book turns of phrase, does not function as a linguistic education in traditional masculine imperatives. Morrison reports Burgess's disapproval of the inclusion in the original American version of a nadsat glossary (x), and we can speculate that this is because such a tool of objective definition is in contradiction to the intended emotionality and instability of the idiom. It undermines too, of course, the reader's experience of its *foreignness*: the word 'nadsat' is etymologically 'a transliteration of the Russian suffix for "teen"' (iii). In *The Neophiliacs*, Booker notes how, after the election of J. F. Kennedy, a 'mechanically make-believe use of language, indiscriminately transforming the commonplace into a preconceived image of the remarkable, was, particularly in the *Observer*, the *Sunday Times* and their respective colour supplements, to become the most distinctive

journalistic reflection of the spirit of the age' (151). In *A Clockwork Orange*, masculine tenets of belief dictate suspicion of a language used not necessarily to convey meaning, but dependent for communication upon sounds and associations instead. Alex notes of his cell-mate's incoherent speech: 'It was all this very old-time real criminal's slang he spoke' (68). The proliferation of such idiolects, in other words, is used as indicative of the dissolution of community in general, when it is in fact indicative of a threat to masculine linguistic rationality. At Alex's 'Reclamation Treatment' (75), a bitter parody of aversion therapy, he is asked his opinion of the cause of the nausea he has come to feel when watching violent films:

'These grahznny sodding veshches that come out of my gulliver and my plott,' I said, 'that's what it is.'

'Quaint,' said Dr Brodksy, like smiling, 'the dialect of the tribe. Do you know anything of its provenance, Branom?'

'Odd bits of old rhyming slang,' said Dr Branom, who did not look quite so much like a friend any more. 'A bit of gipsy talk, too. But most of the roots are Slav. Propaganda. Subliminal penetration.' (91)

Dr Branom's diagnosis involves a series of reductive judgments: Alex's dialect is tarnished by its association with the lower classes (rhyming slang), with gypsies, with the Eastern block (Slavs, and thus communism), and with the manipulation assumed to be endemic in communist politics. In John Wain's *Hurry on Down*, a young, working-class man was excluded from that novel's utopian masculine community on the basis that 'he talked a different

language, for one thing; it was demotic English of the mid-twentieth century, rapid, slurred, essentially a city dialect and, in origin, essentially American' (175). It is a nice twist here that Burgess's demotic dialect is, in effect, 'essentially Russian', but still indicative of a betrayal of the core values of masculine selfhood and nation; still foreign. As is Berger's hero G., youth is portrayed as a threat in its antipathy to capitalist acquisition, as Alex argues against his droog Georgie's proposal of setting up a serious robbery:

'And what will you do,' I said, 'with the big big big deng or money as you so highfaluting call it? Have you not every veshch you need? If you need an auto you pluck it from the trees. If you need pretty polly you take it. Yes? Why this sudden shilarny for being the big bloated capitalist?' (43)

Alex's rehabilitation, as well as promising the reproduction of the patriarchal, capitalist family (by the end of the twenty-first chapter he is clipping pictures of laughing babies from glossy magazines and carrying them in his wallet), reasserts the authority of omniscient narration and universal cognitive privilege. The novel achieves this on a number of levels. As the novel's narrator, Alex has retrospective authority over his material, and his demonstrations of this control are frequent; 'So it was important to me, O my brothers, to get out of this stinking grahzny zoo as soon as I could. And, as you will viddy if you keep reading on, it was not long before I did' (63); 'I jumped, O my brothers, and I fell on the sidewalk hard, but I did not

snuff it, oh no. If I had snuffed it I would not be here to write what I written have' (132). Both the selected quotations emphasise the fact that Alex's story is explicitly *written*, rather than told. The fact that he is in a position to write the story provides some reassurance from the very beginning of the novel that his rehabilitation will have been achieved by its end. Narrative, as we have seen throughout this chapter, is conceived to be curative, healthy. The cover of the 1983 Penguin edition of the novel bills its contents as the 'confessions' of Alex, calling for readers to grant a confessional increment to the narrator before they have opened the book. The novel's creation of such a distinctive narrative voice (or rather, as the text is so emphatically a written one, a distinctive literary narrator) is further emblematic of the fact that the Author, though badly beaten towards the start of the novel, is not dead.

Alex notes of the writer of *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE* and his wife, as the droogs are ready to leave the cottage called HOME, that 'the writer veck and his zheena were not really there, bloody and torn and making noises. But they'd live' (22). Staying at HOME after his 'Reclamation Treatment' is complete, Alex finds a copy of *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE* on the writer's bookshelf and notes of his name 'F. Alexander', 'Good bog, [...] he is another Alex' (124). Indeed, while undergoing the treatment, his sudden realisation of its true and brutal purpose, and the documentary integrity of the films he took to be cleverly edited, is signalled by the involuntary plea: 'Am I just to

be like a clockwork orange?' (100). Like Jim Dixon's 'totem-pole epiphany' in *Lucky Jim*, when he finally says out loud what he thinks, individual authenticity is signalled by the coincidence of imaginative, literary language and public self-expression. Intimations of Alex's immanent surrender to adulthood come during the visit of the Minister of the Interior to his cell at the end of his treatment. Alex writes:

You could viddy who was the real important veck right way, very tall and with blue glazzies and with real horrorshow platties on him, the most lovely suit, brothers, I had ever viddied, absolutely in the heighth of fashion. He just sort of looked right through us poor plennies, saying, in a very beautiful real educated goloss: 'The Government cannot be concerned any longer with outmoded penological theories.' (73)

His word ordering and lack of punctuation in the phrase 'real educated goloss' prevents a definitive decision as to whether 'real' is intended to qualify 'educated' or 'goloss': however, the novel's conclusion, which leaves Alex on the brink of developing the voice he has been using in his narration, suggests the latter. Initially, Alex has mocked an article 'about how Modern youth would be better off if A Lively Appreciation of the Arts could be like encouraged' (35), as classical music routinely functions as foreplay to his bouts of ultraviolence. By the novel's close, however, he has been rehabilitated by the form of the novel itself. He is educated in the 'Three Rs': rationality, realism and retrospection.

Yet although Alex's retrospective narration is some demonstration of his eventual conformity with masculine-prescribed standards of rationality and narrative coherence, his self-narration is not entirely dissonant with the priorities of his younger incarnation. Though not his rational, Alex's *emotional* identification is with his boyish self. Rather than urging a similarly emotional identification in the reader and a concomitant recognition of the cruelty of the treatment, however, the text implies that boys are emotional precisely because emotion is childish. Describing himself strapped to a chair in the Institute with his eyelids prized and clamped open, Alex plaintively writes: 'And then the lights went out and there was Your Humble Narrator and Friend sitting alone in the dark, all on his frightened oddy knocky, not able to move nor shut his glazzies nor anything' (81). Rather than fear, the reader is, in contrast, allowed to share the superior adult understanding of one of the doctors when Alex remarks to him:

'This must be a real horrorshow film if you're so keen on my viddying it.' And one of the white-coat vecks said, smeking:

'Horrorshow is right, friend. A real show of horrors.' (81)

Alex's 'clockwork orange epiphany' is here pre-empted by a 'horrorshow' epiphany of the reader's own, as the word 'horrorshow' is reinstated in its adult, empirical (and English<sup>1</sup>) meaning, over and above its nadsat

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<sup>1</sup> 'Horrorshow' is a corruption of 'kharashó', the neuter form of the Russian for 'good'.



association with pleasure. An 'anxiety of influence' over the infection of rational language with a superficial discourse, dependent upon association and dictated by the young, is dispelled. Alex ends the final chapter by writing:

Yes yes yes, there it was. Youth must go, ah yes. But youth is only being in a way like it might be an animal. No, it is not just like being an animal so much as being like one of these malenky toys you viddy being sold in the streets, like little chellovecks made out of tin and with a spring inside and then a winding handle on the outside and you wind it up grrr grrr grrr and off it itties, like walking, O my brothers. But it itties in a straight line and bangs straight into things bang bang and it cannot help what it is doing. Being young is like being like one of these malenky machines. (148)

Booker's fear of a youth-inspired, media-adopted 'mechanically make-believe use of language' (*Neophiliacs*, 61) is quelled by a reassertion of linguistic and artistic rationality, by implication a reassertion of an adult and essential(ist) masculinity. As *A Clockwork Orange*'s narrator concludes, 'Alex like groweth up, oh yes' (148).

Booker perpetuates the association of the anti-rational with the transatlantic, then adds a further agent of alienation for an English middle-class white male majority:

It was with the rhythmic urgency of rock music that there also arrived from America, borrowed from the self-consciously 'oppressed minority' of the jazz and negro underworld, that curious use of language to express and conjure up the heady, almost indefinable state of being 'hep' or 'in the groove'; a state that amounted to a compulsive psychological condition, a sense of being involved in some mysterious projection of excitement; and that also carried with it

an equally powerful, equally indefinable sense of aggression against all those outside the enchanted circle, the grown-up, conventional and 'boring' world of the 'squares'. (41)

Colin MacInnes's 1957 *City of Spades* has been fêted for the lyricism of its attempt to create enchantment 'outside the enchanted circle'. Contrary to the suggestions by both Burgess and Hewison that irrationality in the behaviour and idiom of youth is mechanistic, MacInnes utilizes precisely the emotive and imaginative capacities of language to oppose a mechanical rationality. In his introduction to the 1969 anthology *Visions of London*, which includes MacInnes's novels *City of Spades* (1957), *Absolute Beginners* (1959) and *Mr Love and Justice* (1960), Francis Wyndham praises the author for his break with empiricism, claiming 'factual authenticity is not the main point of these books' (vii), and asserts that:

Because Colin MacInnes has chosen subjects normally dealt with in Reports by Commissions, or even less responsibly by ignorant journalists, these three novels when they first appeared were treated almost unanimously by reviewers as 'documentaries'. On the contrary, they are lyrical approximations to reality: highly imaginative and on occasion frankly fantastic approaches to themes of which no other contemporary novelist has yet shown himself properly aware. (vii)

(The narrator of *Absolute Beginners* refers to the Angry Generation as 'that bunch of cottage journalists', 328). At the end of the Sixties, Wyndham implies, these novels can at last be approached properly; not measured against a 1950s standard of realism, but by minds liberated, if not by hallucinogenic drugs, then at least by racial mixing and the visionary

subjective: 'Colin MacInnes has a romantic's preference for the private view to the public fact, for a world of his own to the way of the world. Hence the new over-all title, in which the word 'visions' suggests a subjective (and possibly even a hallucinatory) approach to 'documentary' material' (viii). However, a brief analysis of the narrative technique employed in *City of Spades* belies any claim that it privileges the subjectivity of a subaltern character. Johnny Fortune's Lagos-born dialect does inject the novel with the disruptive vitality inherent in positioning spoken words in a written text, and it is certainly rife with the kind of language that Hewison identifies above as 'hep' or 'in the groove':

At this state of our interview, the door was opened and into the room came a short little fattish boy, all smiles and gesticulation, of a type that beats my time: that is, the Spade who's always acting Spadish, so as to make the Jumbles think we're more cool crazy than we are, but usually for some darker purpose to deceive them. But why play this game of his with me? (29)

His vivacity is intended in contrast to Montgomery Pew, Assistant Welfare Officer of the Colonial Department, and Johnny's co-narrator in the novel. Pew's speech, like his name, is designed to emphasise and undermine the authority of an outdated colonial legacy. Johnny's letter to his sister Peach at home recounts the two men's first meeting, mocking Pew's missionary-like tendency to treat him as a child:

'This morning I had my interview at the Welfare Office with – well, do you remember Reverend Simpson? Our tall English minister who used to

walk as if his legs did not belong to him? And spoke to us like a telephone? Well, that was the appearance of the young Mr Pew who interviewed me, preaching and pointing his hands at me as if I was to him a menacing infant....' (39)

This insight appears in the text in quotation marks, however, because its revelation to the reader is dependent upon the fact that Pew comes upon the half-finished letter in Johnny's room, and his narrative further punctuates it by the immediate interjectory exclamation 'Ah!'. Johnny may mock Pew, but Pew is aware of that mockery and grants gracious information of it to the reader. Thus, in a familiar gambit, cognitive privilege is achieved for the reader at the expense of a subscription to white, middle-class masculine standards – Pew's. These standards, founded as they are on rational verbal communication, are ultimately superior both to Johnny's lyricism and his subjectivity: Pew records of Johnny at the end of the novel that there is 'a heightened air of inwardness, of "African-ness" about him' (240).

In its examination of white English youth, however, *Absolute Beginners* affords a more radical disruption of masculine narrative, albeit by a less radical (as non-racial) brand of difference. Wyndham reads this novel's narrative voice as doubled by the kind of retrospective analysis familiar from our consideration of *Scenes from Provincial Life* and *A Clockwork Orange*:

The author has taken a flying leap into the heart of the 'teen-age thing', allowing himself no opportunity for withdrawal and comparative detachment. This results in a slight falsification: the narrator seems too good to be true, for not only does he have the

charms, originality and *insouciance* of a symptom, but also the wit, wisdom and experience of the diagnosis. (viii)

Wyndham's use of the phrase 'wit, wisdom and experience' with reference to the omniscience of retrospective analysis leaves no doubt as to its privilege over 'charms, originality and *insouciance*', but if further proof were necessary, it is present in the diagnosis of illness. Subjectivity is a *symptom* of sickness, and objectivity its cure. In contrast, Steven Connor attributes the radical nature of the narration to its deliberate refusal to 'concede to the novel's tendency to typify the particular' (90). Rather, he claims, it may be distinguished by the way it relates incidents without any apparent plot development of the narrative. The young narrator remains an 'absolute beginner' throughout, untransformed by the benefits of hindsight and adulthood. Connor claims that the novel is anti-realist in its refusal of two crucial aspects of the social 'condition of England' novel: it simplifies the conventional dialectic of character and context, by making the unnamed narrator the period of history through which he lives, and it thwarts the expectations of development and growth, by its narrative stasis and by its invention of a linguistic register which emphasises an 'incommensurability of narrator and readership' (91). Such incommensurability is occasionally signalled in the text by dissonant narratorial comment, as here: 'I should explain (and I hope you'll believe it, even though it's true)' (288). The more



general technique of such a register may be characterised by its merry incorporation of a lengthy description of the functioning of canal locks, born of the assumption that the reader, like the narrator, has never been outside London:

This is the spiel. You form up in a queue, just like at the Odeon, then, when it's your turn, sail in at one end, into a sort of square concrete well, and they shut two big doors behind you, as if you were going away inside the nick, and there you are, like pussy at the bottom of the drain. Then the lock-keeper product – with a peaked cap, and an Albert watch-chain, and rubber boots – throws some switches or other, and the water gushes in, and you'd hardly credit it, but you start going up yourself! (397)

Elsewhere – in *A Clockwork Orange* for example – the innocence of the narrator's experiencing self has been utilized to increase the reader's sense of rational superiority. *Absolute Beginners* is different. Not only does the child-like exuberance of the description make the experience new (or at least newer) for the reader, but the narrator's assumption implicitly critiques a stance that much of contemporary fiction portrays to be 'natural', that is, the reader shares its point of view. The text's lyricism is increased by its distance from empiricism, by its dissonance with the adult reader's experience:

So I went out of the Dubious to catch the summer evening breeze. The night was glorious, out there. The air was sweet as a cool bath, the stars were peeping nosily beyond the neons, and the citizens of the Queendom, in their jeans and separates, were floating down the Shaftesbury avenue canals, like gondolas. Everyone had loot to spend, everyone a bath with verberna salts behind them, and nobody had broken hearts, because they were all ripe for the easy summer evening. (322)



With his teenage dialect, the novel's narrator, then, begins to take on the characteristics of Connor's conception of self as a question of style:

*Absolute Beginners* seems to suggest an abandonment of the large, assimilative perspective of the nation-novel and the novel-nation in favour of the self-inventing and self-legitimizing communities of style that were increasingly generated by the explosion of pop and youth culture in Britain from the 1950s on. (91)

The novel achieves its assertion of the new values of teenage style while simultaneously mocking the empty signifiers by which the youth phenomenon is distinguished by adults. MacInnes's narrator shares Hewison's disgust, noted earlier in this chapter, at the thought of an identity sketched from media sound-bites:

'I dunno about the trouble with *me*,' my oaf brother finally declared, 'but *your* trouble is, you have no social conscience.'

'No what?'

'No social conscience.'

He'd come up close, and I looked into his narrow, meanie eyes. 'That sounds to me,' I said, 'like a parrot-cry pre-packaged for you by your fellow squalids of the Ernie Bevin club.'

'Who put you where you are.'

'Which who? And put me where?'

And now this dear 50 per cent relative of mine came up and prodded my pectorals with a stubby, grubby digit.

'It was the Attlee administrations,' said my bro., in his whining, complaining, platform voice, 'who emancipated the working-man, and gave the teenagers their economic privileges.' (283)

Wyndham's judgement on the novel's nameless narrator, though intended as praise, is riddled with a similar assumption, that 'wit, wisdom and experience' are antithetical to youth, yet the novel's narrator, like the Spades

of *City of Spades*, possesses them *in* spades. This subaltern narratorial authority is what makes the novel radical, rather than the stasis of its narrative, or the gap between that narrative and its readers.

Just as *A Clockwork Orange*'s final narrative conclusion comes from Alex's acceptance of the ideal of reproductive sexuality within a patriarchal, capitalist framework, so the refusal of the narrator of *Absolute Beginners* to provide narrative progression may be linked with his refusal to conform to such a compromised standard of humanity and sexuality. Not that the narrator opposes capitalism. One of the radical characteristics of the narrator's male teenage-hood is his easy, guilt-free adoption and exploitation of the principles of the consumer market. Symbolically, he is a photographer, his living earned immortalising the superficial on a shiny surface, and he is as comfortable blurring the boundaries between Art and pornography as he is blurring those between genders and stylistic influences in his dress code:

I had on precisely my full teenage drag that would enrage [Vernon] – the grey pointed alligator casuals, the pink neon pair of ankle crêpe nylon-stretch, my Cambridge blue glove-fit jeans, a vertical-striped happy shirt revealing my lucky neck-charm on its chain, and the Roman-cut short-arse jacket just referred to... not to mention my wrist identity jewel, and my Spartan warrior hair-do, which everyone thinks costs me 17/6d. in Gerrard Street, Soho, but which I, as a matter of fact, do myself with a pair of nail-scissors and a three-sided mirror that Suzette's got, when I visit her flatlet up in Bayswater, w.2. (278)

The narrator's golden rule for a morally acceptable negotiation of the consumer market, however, is to ensure that the only objects of exchange it involves should be consumer goods. Money is desirable only in that it can be exchanged freely for such goods. Hoarding and fetishizing money itself marks you out as a 'conscript', one of the narrator's habitual terms of moral criticism:

This teenage ball had had a real splendour in the days when the kids discovered that, for the first time since centuries of kingdom-come, they'd money, which hitherto had always been denied to us at the best time in life to use it, namely, when you're young and strong, and also before the newspapers and telly got hold of this teenage fable and prostituted it as conscripts seem to do to everything they touch. Yes, I tell you, it had a real savage splendour in the days when we found that no one couldn't sit on our faces any more because we'd loot to spend at last, and our world was to be our world, the one we wanted and not standing on the doorstep of somebody else's waiting for honey, perhaps. (258)

A strong distinction is made between exploitation of the market (which the narrator's friend Wiz, 'the number one hustler of the capital' (260), used to do in his conveyancing work, 'introducing A to B, or *vice versa*' (260) so that they might exchange their goods and cut him in) and the exploitation of people within a market framework. Wiz himself is somewhat bemused by the narrator's outburst at his move into pimping: "'And this," he said gently, "comes from a kiddo known around the town for flogging pornographic photos"' (320). Another habitual term to convey disapprobation in the novel is the narrator's application of the word 'product' to people: he distinguishes

between 'real' teenagers and those sucked in by media exploitation of the phenomenon by referring to the latter as 'teenage products' (311). The prostitute who supports Wiz is discredited by a note of the fact that she 'had a way of *looking* at you as if you were a possibly valuable product' (383). The novel does offer up an antidote to the corruption of human relations by consumerism, and, predictably, it is a heterosexual relationship. Yet the narrator distinguishes himself by a telling description of his love for Suzette in his declaration that 'I swear the thought of her was more me than than I was' (338) – she is part of his subjectivity, rather than his desired sexual object. When the couple finally have sex, he is careful to distinguish it *from* sex, to avoid a negative context of exploitation, as after rescuing her from race riots in the city, he 'went and got the bowl and things, and washed her all over, and I kissed her between, and there in my place at Napoli we made it at last, but honest, you couldn't say that it was sexy – it was just love' (442). It is telling, though, that this allegedly 'new' code of heterosexual relationships bears a strong resemblance to the ancient one of chivalry. Telling, too, that one of the only times in the novel that the word 'product' is used to describe a person without condemning them is in a reference to his Jewish friends', Mannie's and Miriam's son, whom he calls 'their youthful warrior product, Saul' (328). *This* brand of product has integrity and is desirable. Wiz is quick to diagnose a traditionalist trait in his friend: 'I paid

for him, and Wiz didn't mind my paying, only laughed that little ha-ha laugh of his as we walked down the white and silver metal stair. "Boy," he said, "you're a born adult number. With your conventional outlook, you just can't wait to be a family man'" (259-60). After sex, and after making a meal which the reader sees them 'scoffing like some old married couple' (442), the narrator leaves Suzette in his bed, vowing that they will leave the riots of Napoli the following day on their honeymoon. Though the novel never reaches this resolution, the fact that it is established as a future event, and one which we are given no reason to doubt *will* occur happily ever after, gives the lie to Steven Connor's characterisation of the novel as a narrative without progression.

MacInnes' novel is just as serious as G. in its project to rewrite the terms of History, although it does explicitly reject the Marxist model precisely on the basis of its narrative stasis:

But I saw I was breaking one of my golden rules, which is not to argue with Marxist kiddies, because they *know*. And not only do they know, they're not *responsible* – which is the exact opposite of what they think they are. I mean, this is their thing, if I dig it correctly. You're *in* history, yes, because you're budding here and now, but you're *outside* it, also, because you're living in the Marxist future. And so, when you look around, and see a hundred horrors, and not only musical, you're not responsible for them, because you're beyond them already, in the kingdom of K. Marx. But for me, I must say, all the horrors I see around me, especially the English ones, I feel responsible for, the lot, just as much as for the few nice things I dig. (373)



The title of the novel itself contains a complex joke about the outmoded nature of Marxist divisions of class. Outside a dance academy the narrator passes, the sign reads:

CURRENT CLASSES  
MEDALLISTS CLASS  
BEGINNERS PROGRESSIVE CLASS  
BEGINNERS PRACTICE  
ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

and I said out loud, 'Boy, that one's us! Although me, after my experiences, maybe I'm going to move up a category or two!' (409)

Self-identification is no longer with reference to a traditional, static class structure, but instead to a dynamic meritocracy. *Absolute Beginners* contains two historiographers – the narrator and his father:

'And how's the book going?' I asked my poor old ancestor. Which is a reference to a *History of Pimlico* Dad's said to be composing, but nobody's ever seen it, though it gives him the excuse for getting out of the house, and chatting to people, and visiting public libraries, and reading books. (280)

On his father's death, the narrator is given a dog-eared package by his half-brother Vernon and opens it to find 'hundreds of sheets all grubby and altered and corrected, except for the first one, where he'd written on a single page, "*History of Pimlico. For my one and only son*"' (445). The text of that particular History is not made available to the reader; it does not need to be, for what it represents, a blend of history and History, the personal and the objective, is realised in the text of the novel itself. The tactic of appeal to the



solidarity of a masculine community in any analysis of the state-of-the-nation is explicitly rejected. In fact, it is equated with a *loss* of manhood. At Big Jill's house, the narrator throws down the local newspaper after reading Amberley Drove's column on the race riots in anger: "What's the matter with our men?" I said to her. "Can't they hold their own women? Do they have to get this pronk (and I bashed the Dale daily on to the chair back) to help them and protect them?" (418). Confronted with the reality of the riots, however, the narrator is unable to record it in his customary way: 'I took up my Rolleiflex, but put it down again, because it didn't seem useful any longer' (435). Unlike marriage and a family, a conclusion that is only promised to the reader, the promise of the narrator's decision to abandon his camera is fulfilled in the text itself: he has stopped taking pictures, and started to write<sup>1</sup>. Youth has produced a new type of text, a text that proffers a traditional conclusion without conclusively closing its narrative and achieves a subjective authority without making claims to objectivity. The liberational and cultural potential of this new young masculine narrative,

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<sup>1</sup> In 1964, B. S. Johnson published a short story entitled 'Perhaps it's these Hormones', a pastiche of the MacInnes mode of teenage narration centering upon Johnno, the seventeen-year-old manager of his school-friend and teen pop sensation 'Terry Livid'. The story ends: 'And that's about all I can tell you, mate. I suppose you'll bloody well alter it for your paper. Leave out the dirty bits, like. Nothing I ever said to you boys was ever printed just like I said it. Still, this is my last. Any chance of it coming out this Sunday? I need the loot, mate. Bad' (38-39). Crucially, and in contradiction to MacInnes's narrator, Johnno does not *write* his own story.

however, is to be severely compromised by events at the end of the Sixties. The absolute beginners, it seems, were never to make it to the medallist's class. The student protests of 1968, in Christopher Booker's words, 'provided a jolt to that adulation of Youth for its own sake that since the middle Fifties had become perhaps the predominant characteristic of societies all over the world, from the affluent West to Mao-Tse-Tung's China: a final tragic-comic disproof of the belief in young people's innate "individuality" and "originality"' (296).

### **A Rational Rebellion**

The novels considered in this chapter, with the notable exceptions of *Absolute Beginners* and *G.*, tend towards a reassertion of traditional masculine values of rationalism even as they purport to explode such values. Even the innovative narration of *Absolute Beginners* gestures towards the traditionalist narrative closure of marriage, and *G.* maintains its narrator as male. Just as young male rebels rebel only within the limits sanctioned by their elders, so too are these male writers confusingly complicit with policing the limits of their own innovation. Sex, drugs and youth, apparently in opposition to patriarchal authority, are in fact designated as worthy of literary consideration by the standards of that very authority itself. This chapter has shown how the incorporation of such topics into the fictional output of male

authors is less a concerted process of appropriation than a piecemeal attempt fraught with some genuine aspiration, debilitating reflexes and intense anxiety. Subjectivity is coming to be recognised as a political space. Crucially, though, it is also a *gendered* space, and further, a *feminine* space. A long-established epistemology marks the subjective as irrational, fraught with relativity, sick, and even mad. We have seen how masculine values tend to conflate writing with rational, realist, linear narratives, and with an empirical identification between character and author and reader. An aetiological narrative is crucial both to an essentialist and an existential conception of the masculine self. In owning up to its subjectivity, then, the existence of writing itself is considered to be under threat. This threat results in a contradiction: texts professing the intention to surrender narrative authority end in a reflex reassertion of that authority itself. The assumed assurance of a confessional increment ensures that authorial presence is increased rather than abandoned. Writing pertaining to these 'masculine' values is still upheld as rehabilitation for droogs and drug addicts alike.

## Conclusions: Reading to Belie the Binary

His ruler coming down and measuring them. Why all this criticism of other people? Why not some system that includes the good? What a discovery that would be – a system that did not shut out.  
Virginia Woolf, diary entry on the publication of  
D. H. Lawrence's letters (2 October 1932)

In her 1971 book *Woman's Estate*, Juliet Mitchell notes how the liberationist potential of the existentialism considered in Chapter Three and the designated 'Sixties themes' in Chapter Four had yet to be politically realised at her time of writing. The influx of cultural value into feminine qualities such as subjectivity and empathy, she claims, promised feminists much towards a social re-evaluation of women themselves: 'that these female values were appropriated by male radicals initially gave women hope within these movements. But when they found even here, where their oppressed characteristics seemed to be the order of the day, they played a secondary (to be generous) role, righteous resentment was rampant' (175). For all their aspiration, the texts considered throughout this thesis confirm that such resentment was justifiably rampant at the end of the historical period considered here. I set out to discover whether men of the period had become critical of their gender as an untenable concept based upon debilitating tenets before the prompt provided by Second Wave feminism. I aimed to assess whether male writers were prepared to surrender their contrived positions of

social and artistic dominance in order to contribute to the forging of a more equal and expressive textual subject-position. The answer from their fiction may not be ultimate, but it is resounding – ‘not yet’. It was, of course, to a great extent, the ‘righteous resentment’ at this arrested cultural and social development that fuelled feminism in the following years. Its radical and comprehensive deconstruction of masculine epistemology, and the misogynist ontology that sought to naturalise it, both inspired and was inspired by the simultaneous development of critiques of its colonialism, racism and heterosexism. Together, these critiques systematically deconstructed that most grandiose of masculine narratives – History.

In its focus upon the function of the male gender in male-authored fiction from 1950 to 1971, this study has sought to undermine the enduring conception of the English Fifties as a time of apathetic stasis. Its typifying fictions have been upheld to be engaged within a covert and conservative politics, and complex and enlightening from a literary standpoint as well as a contextual one. The concept of the Sixties as a burst of jubilant change, characterised by the unfettered discovery of selves and of sex, has been revealed as similarly problematic from a literary perspective. Still to be achieved is a comprehensive examination of the male-authored fiction that accompanied this swell of the Second Wave, including a consideration of why, as Ian McEwan confessed to the editor of *Granta*, his fame in the fiction

market of the 1970s was relatively easy, as 'the horizon was uncluttered' (quoted by Elaine Showalter, in 'Ladlit', 66). Until then, we can only speculate as to the muted nature of English male fictional response to the contemporary development of feminism; muted, that is, until its vociferous regrouping in the 1980s, in which consumerism, paternity and sexuality, as they have been in the fiction considered here, remain crucial themes.

The two conceptions of selfhood that have been outlined in this post-war period (themselves representing an ancient philosophical divide) retain their significance in contemporary culture. We continue to negotiate between existentialist and essentialist understandings of identity, frequently, as in the novels considered here, conflating these identities with those of gender. Though the acknowledgement and exploration of linguistic contingency was noticeably absent as a mode of expressing angst in male fiction of the post-Second World War period, an explicitly existentialist understanding of selfhood has now been incorporated into the post-structuralist radical uncertainty inherent in a belief that linguistic operation is the only means of self-conception. The lingering link between masculinity, maleness and the male body that I have criticised throughout this thesis indicates that the essentialism of the masculine side of the gender binary has not been banished from contemporary consciousness. Gender, as a mutable cultural concept, might be expected to have long surrendered all



appeals to the primal and the transcendent, yet still the *Iron John* school of the Men's Movement continues to cash in. This appeal to nature is resurrected for the familiar patriarchal purpose of normalising a particular power relation, but also for more insidious motives swathed in blame and guilt.

Such essentialism is allowed to endure because masculinity has still to be interrogated to the extent undergone by femininity. The gender is in danger of becoming a kind of conceptual scapegoat, conveniently encompassing every mode of behaviour or expression that is technocratic, bullying or violent. Feminism has striven to claim numerous purportedly 'feminine', or womanly, attributes for bilateral good, so we should not be too hasty in rejecting everything properly designated 'masculine' to be beyond redemption. This thesis has framed the textual process by which male fiction of a particular era manipulates its reader, by formal and by philosophical means, into complicity with a masculine epistemology of hierarchical binarisms. The process of reading is neither purely hermeneutic nor purely emotive: as Judith Kegan Gardiner notes, it is 'cognitive as well as affective' (2). In its appeal to a 'universal' male experience, the masculine text understands the identification of its ideal reader to be entirely hermeneutic, denying both its provisional and emotional nature. Yet its primary function, through the process of 'suture', or the enmeshment of the reader within its structures of power and meaning, is to create a community. Readers will

always want to belong, and the experience of belonging, as we have seen in our examination of a multi-layered process of recognition, emotional investment and compromise in response to the fiction here, is not passive. Neither is it necessarily regressive. Recreating an experience as if it were a shared one, no matter how divergent from the reader's own context it might be, bridges the boundary of self and other. Empathic reading (where the concept is understood to involve, as for Gardiner, both cognitive and affective responses) refutes both the binary of gender, and gendered conceptions of the processes of reading and writing. Though rejected as an oppressive normative standard, the masculine narrative remains a source both of stylistic ideas and political and textual tactics available to male and female writers and readers.

Failure to pillage the masculine in this way will merely perpetuate a binary conception of *écriture*, with men bound to standards of linguistic rationality just as women, for Irigaray, for example, are irrevocably condemned to excommunication from an inescapably misogynist linguistic and symbolic system. The idea of gendered modes of writing, however bilaterally available, risks continuation of the paradox of gender as simultaneously inherent and culturally imposed, semiotic and symbolic. Of course gender, however unstable as a concept, will continue to retain a powerful cultural and personal influence. Its ability to inspire identification

with a broad church of people is potentially positive, particularly in comparison, for example, with the impossibly diffuse 'identity politics' of later feminism. Yet a reader's empathic response to gender should remain just one of many potential and provisional empathies within multiple valid codes of reader-identification.

Texts will always address an ideal reader, even if that reader's identity changes amidst multiple textual viewpoints. Yet it is the text's response to its own addressivity that is vital in eliciting reader empathy. For the fiction considered here, addressivity is a shameful business, as its acknowledgement of special pleading interferes with a sacred absolute; the universality of knowledge organised upon masculine principles. The function of narrative, as we have seen, is inextricably involved with conceptions of selfhood. Between essence and existence is an understanding of selfhood as a form of narrative itself, or, as Worthington puts it, 'a creative narrative process achieved within a plurality of intersubjective communicative protocols' (12). The narrative of this contemporary self is coherent but provisional, and by necessity retrospective, where this insinuates not total authorial control, as in the masculine text, but rather the unavoidable recognition of provisionality. This conception of self as a provisional narrative, and of textual identification as similarly provisional, removes the possibility of *enforcing* an ideal reader; rather, that reader, if willing, is self-appointed, and self-aware. Reading to

believe the masculine binarisms of selfhood and of text removes many enduring contradictions within our understanding of the reading process. It allows me to laugh with Jim Dixon while understanding (and ideologically rejecting) the way in which that laughter is generated. It rejects the gaze for a celebration of the look. It elicits empathy with an Absolute Beginner even as he deliberately excludes you from the innocent optimism of his youth. It refuses to allow textual manipulation to remain unknowing. It values both a male response to feminism, and a female response to masculinity. This sort of multi-layered critical reader-response is eminently possible. Both men and women have been negotiating it for years in their engagements with the masculine text.

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